



Understand France

FRANCE TODAY898

In recent years there have been urban riots and an international financial crisis. How has France fared?

HISTORY 901

Charlemagne, William the Conqueror, Joan of Arc, Louis XIV, Napoléon, Charles de Gaulle – just some who've had starring roles in the story of France.

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population per sq km

FRANCE



USA



UK


 ≈ 30 people

France Today

A New Breed of President

Presidential elections in 2007 ushered out old-school Jacques Chirac (in his 70s with two terms under his belt) and brought in Nicolas Sarkozy (b 1955). Dynamic, ambitious and far from media-shy, the former interior minister and chairman of centre-right party UMP (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*) wooed voters with big talk about job creation, lower taxes, crime crackdown and help for France's substantial immigrant population – something that had particular pulling power coming from the son of a Hungarian immigrant father and Greek Jewish-French mother. Female Socialist Party candidate Ségolène Royal (b 1953) put up a grand fight. But the majority of French, fed up with an economically stagnant, socially discontented France, appeared to be looking for change. And this personality-driven, silky-tongued politician seemed to be the man to do it. A new breed of French president was born.

Yet rather than the work of knuckling down to implement his rigorous economic reform platform, it was Sarkozy's personal affairs that got the attention in his first months in office – falling out of love with wife Cecilia, divorcing, falling in love with Italian multimillionaire singer Carla Bruni and remarrying, all in a few hasty months. His popularity plummeted and it seemed the honeymoon was over.

Economic Woes

Sarkozy pledged to reduce unemployment and income tax (between 5.5% and 40%), create jobs and boost growth in a economy that nonetheless ranks as the world's eighth largest. Unemployment frog-leaped from 8.7% in 2007, to 7.6% during the global banking crisis in 2008 (when the government injected €10.5 billion into France's six major banks), to 9.1% in 2010 – all to the horror of the French, who traditionally

- » Population: 64.4 million
- » Area: 551,000 sq km
- » GDP: US\$2.10 trillion
- » GDP growth: -2.2%
- » Inflation: 0.1%
- » Unemployment: 9.1%

Faux Pas

- » Splitting the bill is deemed the height of unsophistication. The person who invites pays, although close friends often go Dutch.
- » Fondle fruit, veg, flowers or clothing in shops and you'll be greeted with a killer glare from the shop assistant
- » Take flowers (not chrysanthemums, which are only brought to cemeteries) or Champagne when invited to someone's home
- » Never ever discuss money over dinner

Top Books

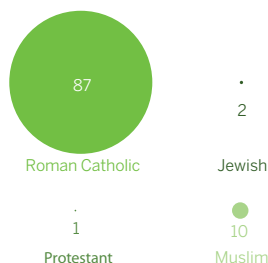
The Death of French Culture

(Donald Morrison) Thought-provoking look at France's past and present

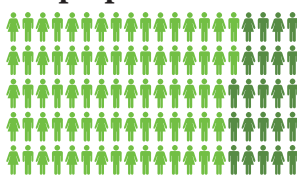
Me Talk Pretty One Day (David Sedaris) Caustic take on moving to France and learning the lingo

belief systems

(% of population)



if France were 100 people



77 would live in cities
23 would live in rural areas

have great expectations of their economy: France is a country accustomed to receiving free education and health care (employees pay 8% of their salary in social-security contributions, deducted at source), state-subsidised child care, travel concessions for families, ample leisure time and a 35-hour working week. In June 2009 economic growth shrank by 1.3% and for a few fleeting months France joined much of the rest of Europe in recession.

Hard-line attempts to reform a pension system, unchanged since 1982, which entitles 1.6 million workers in the rail, metro, energy-supply and fishing industries to draw a full state pension after 37.5 working years (and everyone else after 40), only provoked widespread dismay and a series of national strikes and protests. So too have suggestions that the retirement age, currently 60, should be extended to at least 62 (it is much higher in almost every other European country). In June 2010 when the French government unveiled concrete plans to push the retirement age back to 62 by 2018, much of the country went on strike.

Helter-Skelter Downhill

If the results of the 2010 regional elections are anything to go by, Sarkozy could be out of a job after the next presidential elections in 2012. His party got a real battering, the left scooping 54% of votes and control of 21 out of 22 regions on mainland France and Corsica – Alsace in northeast France was the only region the centre-right UMP held on to.

By spring 2010 unemployment was hovering at a disconcerting 10% and government popularity at an all-time low. Inciting further disillusionment with the government, scandal erupted in July over allegations by investigative news service Mediapart that France's richest woman and L'Oréal heir, 87-year-old Liliane Bettencourt, had made illegal cash

France maintains a rigid distinction between Church and State. Indeed, the country is a secular republic, meaning no mention of religion – any religion – on national school syllabuses.

Top Surfs

Paris by Mouth (<http://parisby-mouth.com>) Resource for capital dining and drinking

Wine Travel Guide (www.wine-travelguides.com)

France 24 (www.france24.com/en/france) French news in English

Top Albums

Histoire de Melody Nelson (Serge Gainsbourg, 1971)

France's most-loved crooner

Moon Safari (AIR; 1998)

Electronic

Made in Medina (Rachid Taha, 2002) *Rai*

Dante (Abd al Malik, 2008) Rap

Top Films

Code Inconnu (Code Unknown; 2001) Art-house film

Les Choristes (The Chorus; 2004) Stunning soundtrack!

La Môme (La Vie en Rose; 2007) Story of singer Edith Piaf

Lucky Luke (2009) France's most famous cowboy

France has always drawn immigrants: 4.3 million from Europe between 1850 and WWI, and another three million between the world wars. Post-WWII, several million unskilled workers followed from North Africa and French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa.

donations of €150,000 to Sarkozy's 2007 presidential election campaign. By law, nonparty members can donate up to €7500 (maximum €150 in cash). French prosecutors are investigating.

What was seen as a measurement of just how volatile the country had become came the same month – riots ripped through the Alpine town of Grenoble after a 27-year-old man was shot dead by police while allegedly trying to rob a casino. The burning cars and street clashes with riot police echoed the violence that had bloodied a Parisian suburb in 2005 – and spread like wildfire countrywide creating a state of emergency – following the death of two teenage boys, electrocuted after hiding in an electrical substation while on the run from the police.

The two boys were of North African origin, an ethnic minority in a country long known for its multiculturalism. Several thousand burnt cars and buildings later, after peace was restored, then-president Jacques Chirac had assured France there would be no more urban violence and steps would be taken to create equal opportunities for immigrants.

Banning the Burqa

The wearing of crucifixes, the Islamic headscarf and other overtly religious symbols in state schools has been banned in France since 2004, and in September 2010 a controversial law banning face-covering veils in public was approved by the Senate – by 246 votes to one. Intended to place school children on an equal footing in the classroom, the law is seen by many Muslims in particular as intolerant and evidence that the French State is not prepared to truly integrate them into French society. Women caught wearing a burqa will be fined €150 and be required to attend 'citizenship classes'.

Greeting People

- » 'Monsieur' for men; 'Madame' for 'Mrs'; 'Mademoiselle' for unmarried women – to be used upon entering a shop, restaurant etc
- » 'S'il vous plaît' – never 'garçon' (meaning 'boy') – is the only way to summon a waiter

Cheese Etiquette

- » Cut small circular cheeses into pie wedges
- » Larger cheeses already sliced into a wedge must be cut tip to rind – don't slice off the tip
- » Chop semihard cheeses horizontally

Tap Water

- » Safe to drink, as is water spouting from fountains flagged 'eau potable'
- » If the sign says 'eau non potable', don't drink it!
- » Save money by ordering *une carafe d'eau* (a jug of free tap water)



History

The history of France could be said to be a microcosm of the history of much of Europe. As elsewhere, the beginnings involved the mass migration of a nomadic people (the peripatetic Celts), the subjugation by and – dare we say? – the civilising influence of the Romans, and the rise of a local nobility. Christianity would bring a degree of unity, but perhaps nowhere else would such a strongly independent church continue to coexist under a powerful central authority. From Charles ‘The Hammer’ Martel and Louis XIV’s claim to be the state itself, to the present government’s ambitious president dealing with ‘60 million different opinions’, this dichotomy is the basis of France’s story.

The following is just a broad introduction to the history of France. If you would like to know more about this extensive and very complex subject – either in general or on a specific topic – see p902 for some recommended titles.

Roman Gaul

What is now France was settled by several different groups of people in the Iron Age, but the largest and most organised were the Celtic Gauls. The subjugation of these people and their territory by Rome was gradual, and within a few centuries Rome had imposed its government, roads, trade, culture and even language. A Gallo-Roman culture emerged and Gaul was increasingly integrated into the Roman Empire.

It began in the 1st millennium BC as the Greeks and Romans established colonies on the Mediterranean coast, including Massilia (Marseille). Centuries of conflict between the Gauls and the Romans ended in 52 BC when Caesar’s legions crushed a revolt by many Gallic tribes led by Celtic Arverni tribe chief Vercingétorix at Gergovia near present-day Clermont-Ferrand. For the next couple of years, during the so-called Gallic Wars, the Gauls hounded the Romans with guerrilla warfare and stood up to them in several match-drawn pitched

TIMELINE

c 30,000 BC

During the Middle Palaeolithic Period, Cro-Magnon people start decorating their homes in the Vézère Valley of the Dordogne with colourful scenes of animals, human figures and geometric shapes.

c 7000 BC

Neolithic man turns his hand to monumental menhirs and dolmen during the New Stone Age, creating a fine collection in Brittany that continues to baffle historians.

1500–500 BC

Celtic Gauls move into the region and establish trading links with the Greeks, whose colonies included Massilia (Marseille) on the Mediterranean coast; the latter bring grapes and olives.

battles. But gradually Gallic resistance collapsed and Roman rule in Gaul reigned supreme.

The stone architecture left by the occupiers was impressive and Roman France is magnificent, climaxing with the mighty Pont du Gard aqueduct, built to bring water to the city of Nîmes in southern France, and splendid theatres and amphitheatres dating from this period are still extant in that city as well as at Autun, Arles and Orange. Some Roman remains became part of something else. In an early form of recycling, the 1st-century Roman amphitheatre at Périgueux in the Dordogne was dismantled in the 3rd century and its stones were used to build the city walls.

Romans' intangible legacy to what would become a new culture was equally great. Sophisticated urban centres with markets and baths of hot and cold running water began to emerge. The Romans planted vineyards, notably in Burgundy and Bordeaux, and introduced techniques to process wine. Most importantly, they introduced the newfangled faith of Christianity, which would eventually beat out the not-dissimilar worship of Mithra in the popularity sweepstakes.

Later the Franks would adopt these important elements of Gallo-Roman civilisation (including Christianity), and their eventual assimilation resulted in a fusion of Germanic culture with that of the Celts and the Romans.

HISTORICAL READS

» **Is Paris Burning?** (Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre; 1965) A tense and very intelligent reportage of the last days of the Nazi occupation of Paris.

» **The French** (Theodore Zeldin; 1997) Stimulating social history in the guise of a 'how-to' book by the British scholar who was appointed to a committee advising the Sarkozy government on labour-market reforms in 2007.

» **Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution** (Simon Schama; 1990) Highly acclaimed and truly monumental work that looks at the first few years of the revolutionary government after 1789.

» **The Sun King** (Nancy Mitford; 1966) Classic work on Louis XIV and the country he ruled by acclaimed author and biographer who lived and died in Versailles.

» **The Discovery of France: A Historical Geography** (Graham Robb; 2008) Winner of the 2008 Ondaatje Prize, this much-lauded work is an anecdotal account of France's formation based on 20,000km of research by bicycle around rural France.

» **The Shameful Peace: How French Artists and Intellectuals Survived the Nazi Occupation** (Frederic Spotts; 2010) This is the book that separates the wheat from the chaff, the saints from the sinners, the 'no' and the 'yes' men.

3rd century BC

The Celtic Parisii tribe builds a handful of wattle-and-daub huts on what is now the Île de la Cité in Paris; the capital city is christened Lutetia by the Romans.

121 BC

The Romans begin taking Gallic territory, annexing southern Gaul as the province of Gallia Narbonensis (in modern Provence and Languedoc), with its capital at the present-day town of Narbonne.

55–52 BC c AD 100–300

Julius Caesar launches his invasion of Britain from the Côte d'Opale in far northern France; the Gauls defeat the Romans at Gergovia near present-day Clermont-Ferrand.

The Romans go on a building spree throughout France, erecting magnificent baths, temples and aqueducts of almighty proportions such as the Pont du Gard near Nîmes in southern France.

The Agony & the Ecstasy: Medieval France

The collapse of the Roman Empire opened the gates to a wave of Franks and other Germanic tribes under Merovius from the north and north-east who overran the territory. Merovius' grandson, Clovis I, converted to Christianity, giving him greater legitimacy and power over his Christian subjects, and made Paris his seat; his successors founded the abbey of St-Germain des Prés in Paris and later the one at St-Denis to the north, which would become the richest, most important monastery in France and the final resting place of its kings.

The Frankish tradition, by which the king was succeeded by all of his sons, led to power struggles and the eventual disintegration of the kingdom into a collection of small feudal states. The dominant house to emerge was that of the Carolingians.

Carolingian power reached apogee under Charlemagne, who extended the boundaries of the kingdom and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor (Emperor of the West) in 800. But during the 9th century Scandinavian Vikings (also called Norsemen, thus Normans) raided France's western coast, settling in the lower Seine Valley and forming the duchy of Normandy a century later. This would be a century of disunity in France, marked politically by the rise of Norman power and religiously by the foundation of influential abbeys like the Benedictine one at Cluny. By the time Hugh Capet ascended the throne in 987, heralding the arrival of the Capetian dynasty, the king's domain was a humble parcel of land around Paris and Orléans.

The exciting tale of how William the Conqueror and his forces mounted a successful invasion of England from their base in Normandy in 1066 is told on the Bayeux Tapestry, showcased inside Bayeux' Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux. To complicate matters further, in 1152 Eleanor of Aquitaine wed Henry of Anjou, bringing a further third of France under the control of the English crown. The subsequent rivalry between France and England for control of Aquitaine and the vast English territories in France lasted three centuries.

Hundred Years War

In 1337 the hostility between the Capetians and the Anglo-Normans degenerated into the Hundred Years War, which would be fought on and off until the middle of the 15th century. The Black Death, which broke out a decade after the hostilities began and lasted more than two years, killed more than a third (an estimated 80,000 souls) of Paris' population alone but only briefly interrupted the fighting.

The French suffered particularly nasty defeats at Crécy and Agincourt. Abbey-studded Mont St-Michel in present-day Normandy was the only place in northern and western France not to fall into English

The French invented the first digital calculator, the hot-air balloon, Braille and margarine, not to mention Grand Prix racing and the first public interactive computer network. Find out what else at <http://inventors.about.com/od/frenchinventors>.

c 455–70

France remains under Roman rule until the 5th century, when the Franks (hence the name 'France') and the Alemanni invade and overrun the country from the east.

732

Somewhere near Poitiers Charles Martel and his cavalry repel the Muslim Moors. His grandson, Charlemagne, extends the boundaries of the kingdom and is crowned Holy Roman Emperor.

800–900

Scandinavian Vikings (also called Norsemen, thus Normans) raid France's western coast and settle in the lower Seine Valley where they later form the Duchy of Normandy.

987

Five centuries of Merovingian and Carolingian rule ends with the crowning of Hugh Capet; a dynasty that will rule one of Europe's most powerful countries for the next eight centuries is born.

hands. The dukes of Burgundy (allied with the English) occupied Paris and in 1422 John Plantagenet, duke of Bedford, was made regent of France for England's King Henry VI, then an infant. Less than a decade later he was crowned king of France.

Luckily for the French, a 17-year-old girl called Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc) came along with the outlandish tale that she had a divine mission from God to expel the English from France and bring about the coronation of French legitimist Charles VII in Reims.

The Virgin Warrior

Many stories surround the origins of Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc), the legendary *pucelle* (virgin) warrior burned at the stake by the English, and France's patron saint. Some say she was the bastard child of Louis d'Orléans, King Charles VI's brother. The less glamorous but more accurate account pinpoints Domrémy in northeastern France (Domrémy-la-Pucelle today) as the place where she was born to a simple peasant family in 1412.

Revelations delivered by the Archangel Michael prompted Jeanne d'Arc to flee the fold in 1428. Her mission: to raise a siege against the city of Orléans and see the dauphin (the future Charles VII) crowned king of France. An enquiry conducted by clergy and university clerks in Poitiers tried to establish if Jeanne d'Arc was a fraud or a gift, as she claimed, from the king of Heaven to the king of France. Her virginity was likewise certified. Following the six-week interrogation Jeanne was

PRIMITIVE ART

The Cro-Magnons, a *Homo sapiens* variety who arrived in what is now France about 35,000 years ago, had larger brains than their ancestors, the Neanderthals, long and narrow skulls, and short, wide faces. Their hands were nimble, and with the aid of improved tools they hunted reindeer, bison, horses and mammoths to eat. They played music, danced and had fairly complex social patterns.

Those agile hands were not just used to make tools and hunt; Cro-Magnons were also artists. A tour of Grotte de Lascaux II – a replica of the Lascaux cave where one of the world's best examples of Cro-Magnon drawings was found in 1940 – demonstrates how initial simplistic drawings and engravings of animals gradually became more detailed and realistic. Dubbed 'Périgord's Sistine Chapel', the Lascaux cave contains some 2000 paintings of human figures and abstract signs as well as animals and is one of 25 known decorated caves in Dordogne's Vézère Valley (see also p573).

The Neolithic Period produced France's incredible collection of menhirs and dolmens: Brittany's Morbihan Coast is awash in megalithic monuments.

1066

Duke of Normandy William the Conqueror and his Norman forces occupy England, making Normandy and, later, Plantagenet-ruled England formidable rivals of the kingdom of France.

1095

Pope Urban II preaches the First Crusade in Clermont-Ferrand, prompting France to take a leading role and giving rise to some splendid cathedrals, eg at Reims, Strasbourg, Metz and Chartres.

1152

Eleanor of Aquitaine weds Henry of Anjou, bringing a further third of France under the control of the English crown and sparking a French-English rivalry that will last three centuries.

1253

La Sorbonne is founded by Robert de Sorbon, confessor of Louis IX, as a theological college for impoverished students in the area of the Left Bank known as the Latin Quarter.

sent by Charles VII to Tours, where she was equipped with intendants, a horse, a sword and her own standard featuring God sitting in judgment on a cloud. In Blois the divine warrior collected her army, drummed up by Charles VII from his Royal Army Headquarters there. In April 1429 Jeanne d'Arc started her attack on Orléans, besieged by the English from October of the previous year. Defiant to their defences she entered the city, rallying its inhabitants and gaining their support. On 5 and 6 May respectively the French gained control of the Bastille St-Loup and the Bastille des Augustins, followed the next day by the legendary Fort des Tourelles – a fort guarding the only access to the city from the left bank. This last shattering defeat prompted the English to lay down the siege on 8 May and was a decisive turning point in the Hundred Years War.

From Orléans Jeanne d'Arc went on to defeat the English at Jargeau, Beaugency and Patay. Charles VII stayed at châteaux in Loches and Sully-sur-Loire at this time and prayed to St Benedict with his protégé at Abbaye de St-Benoît in St-Benoît-sur-Loire. Despite Charles' promised coronation in July 1429, battles between the English and the French waged until 1453, by which time the virginal warrior responsible for turning the war around had long been dead. Jeanne d'Arc was captured by the Burgundians, sold to the English, convicted of witchcraft and heresy by a tribunal of French ecclesiastics in Rouen in 1431 and burned at the stake. She was canonised in 1920.

Track France in the news, learn about its history and catch up on stacks more background info with www.discoverfrance.net.

NEWS

The Rise of the French Court

With the arrival of Italian Renaissance culture during the reign of François I (r 1515–47), the focus shifted to the Loire Valley. Italian artists decorated royal castles at Amboise, Azay-le-Rideau, Blois, Chambord and Chaumont, with Leonardo da Vinci making Le Clos Lucé in Amboise his home for three years until his death in 1519.

Renaissance ideas of scientific and geographic scholarship and discovery assumed a new importance, as did the value of secular matters over religious life. Writers such as Rabelais, Marot and Ronsard of La Pléiade were influential as were artist and architect disciples of Michelangelo and Raphael. Evidence of this architectural influence can be seen in François I's château at Fontainebleau – where superb artisans, many of them brought over from Italy, blended Italian and French styles to create what is known as the First School of Fontainebleau – and the Petit Château at Chantilly, both near Paris. This new architecture was meant to reflect the splendour of the monarchy, which was fast moving towards absolutism. But all this grandeur and show of strength was not enough to stem the tide of Protestantism that was flowing into France.

The Reformation swept through Europe in the 1530s, spearheaded by the ideas of Jean (John) Calvin, a Frenchman born in Picardy but

1309

French-born Pope Clément V moves papal headquarters from Rome to Avignon, where the Holy Seat remains until 1377; 'home' is the resplendent Palais des Papes built under Benoît XII (1334–42).

1337

Incessant struggles between the Capetians and England's King Edward III, a Plantagenet, over the powerful French throne degenerate into the Hundred Years War, which will last until 1453.

1358

The war between France and England and the devastation and poverty caused by the plague lead to the ill-fated peasants' revolt led by Étienne Marcel.

1422

John Plantagenet, duke of Bedford, is made regent of France for England's King Henry VI, then an infant; in less than a decade he is crowned king of France at Paris' Notre Dame.

exiled to Geneva. Following the Edict of January 1562, which afforded the Protestants certain rights, the Wars of Religion broke out between the Huguenots (French Protestants who received help from the English), the Catholic League (led by the House of Guise) and the Catholic monarchy, and lasting three dozen years.

Henri IV, founder of the Bourbon dynasty, issued the controversial Edict of Nantes in 1598, guaranteeing the Huguenots many civil and political rights, notably freedom of conscience. Ultra-Catholic Paris refused to allow the new Protestant king to enter the city, and a siege of the capital continued for almost five years. Only when Henri IV embraced Catholicism at the cathedral in St-Denis did the capital submit to him.

Arguably France's most famous king of this or any other century, Louis XIV (r 1643–1715), called *Le Roi Soleil* (the Sun King), ascended the throne at the tender age of five. Bolstered by claims of divine right – indeed, he was yet another Louis named after France's patron saint, and paintings in the Royal Chapel at Versailles evoke the idea that the French king was chosen by God and is thus his lieutenant on earth – he involved the kingdom in a series of costly, almost continuous wars with Holland, Austria and England, which gained France territory but nearly bankrupted the treasury. State taxation to refill the coffers caused widespread poverty and vagrancy, especially in the cities. In Versailles, Louis XIV built an extravagant palace and made his courtiers compete with each other for royal favour, thereby quashing the ambitious, feud-ing aristocracy and creating the first centralised French state. In 1685 he revoked the Edict of Nantes.

The Seven Years War (1756–63), known as the French and Indian War in North America, was one of a series of ruinous military engagements pursued by Louis XV, the Sun King's grandson. It led to the loss of France's flourishing colonies in Canada, the West Indies and India. It was in part to avenge these losses that his successor Louis XVI sided with the colonists in the American War of Independence a dozen years later. But the Seven Years War cost France a fortune and, more disastrously for the monarchy, it helped to disseminate at home the radical democratic ideas that were thrust upon the world stage by the American Revolution.

From Revolution to Republic

As the 18th century progressed, new economic and social circumstances rendered the *ancien régime* (old order) dangerously out of step with the needs of the country. The regime was further weakened by the antiestablishment and anticlerical ideas of the Enlightenment, whose leading lights included Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot. But entrenched

1431

Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc) is burned at the stake in Rouen for heresy; the English are not driven out of France until 1453.

1491

Charles VIII weds Anne de Bretagne at Château de Langeais in the castle-studded Loire Valley, marking the unification of independent Brittany with France.



» Statue of Joan of Arc, Paris

vested interests, a cumbersome power structure and royal lassitude prevented change from starting until the 1770s, by which time the monarchy's moment had passed.

By the late 1780s, the indecisive Louis XVI and his dominating consort, Marie-Antoinette, had managed to alienate virtually every segment of society, and the king became increasingly isolated as unrest and dissatisfaction reached boiling point. When he tried to neutralise the power of the more reform-minded delegates at a meeting of the États-Généraux (States-General) at the Jeu de Paume in Versailles in May and June 1789, the masses took to the streets of Paris. On 14 July, a mob raided the armoury at the Hôtel des Invalides for rifles, seizing 32,000 muskets, then stormed the prison at Bastille – the ultimate symbol of the despotic *ancien régime*. The French Revolution had begun.

At first, the Revolution was in the hands of moderate republicans called the Girondins. France was declared a constitutional monarchy and various reforms were introduced, including the adoption of the Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen) modelled on the American Declaration of Independence. But as the masses armed themselves against the external threat to the new government – posed by Austria, Prussia and the exiled French nobles – patriotism and nationalism mixed with extreme fervour, popularising and radicalising the Revolution. It was not long before the Girondins lost out to the extremist Jacobins, who abolished the monarchy and declared the First Republic after Louis XVI proved unreliable as a constitutional monarch. The Assemblée Nationale (National Assembly) was replaced by an elected Revolutionary Convention.

In January 1793 Louis XVI, who had tried to flee the country with his family but only got as far as Lorraine, was convicted of 'conspiring against the liberty of the nation' and guillotined at place de la Révolution, today's place de la Concorde, in Paris. Two months later the Jacobins set up the notorious Committee of Public Safety to deal with national defence and to apprehend and try 'traitors'. This body had dictatorial control over the country during the so-called Reign of Terror (September 1793 to July 1794), which saw most religious freedoms revoked and churches closed to worship and desecrated, cathedrals turned into 'Temples of Reason', and thousands incarcerated in dungeons in Paris' Conciergerie on Île de la Cité before being beheaded.

After the Reign of Terror faded, a five-man delegation of moderate republicans set itself up to rule the republic as the Directoire (Directory).

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Keep tabs on the moves and motions of France's National Assembly at www.assemblee-nat.fr.

1515

With the reign of François I the royal court moves to the Loire Valley, where a rash of stunning Renaissance châteaux and hunting lodges is built.

1530s

The Reformation, spurred by the writings of French Jean (John) Calvin, sweeps through France, pitting Catholics against Protestants and eventually leading to the Wars of Religion (1562–98).

1572

Some 3000 Huguenots visiting Paris to celebrate the wedding of the Protestant Henri of Navarre (the future Henri IV) are slaughtered on 23–24 August, in the so-called St Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

1588

The Catholic League forces Henri III (r 1574–89), the last of the Valois kings, to flee the royal court at the Louvre; the next year he is assassinated by a fanatical Dominican friar.

Napoléon & Empire

It was true happenstance that brought a dashing young Corsican general named Napoléon Bonaparte to the attention of France. In October 1795 a group of royalist youths bent on overthrowing the Directory were intercepted on rue St-Honoré in Paris by forces under Bonaparte, who fired into the crowd. For this 'whiff of grapeshot' he was put in command of the French forces in Italy, where he was particularly successful in the campaign against Austria. His victories would soon turn him into an independent political force.

In 1799 Napoléon overthrew the Directory and assumed power as First Consul, chosen by popular vote. A referendum three years later declared him 'Consul for Life' and his birthday became a national holiday. In 1804, when he crowned himself 'Emperor of the French' in the presence of Pope Pius VII at Notre Dame in Paris, the scope and nature of Napoléon's ambitions were obvious to all.

To consolidate and legitimise his authority, Napoléon needed more victories on the battlefield. So began a seemingly endless series of wars and victories by which France would come to control most of Europe. In 1812 his troops captured Moscow, only to be killed off by the brutal Russian winter. Two years later Allied armies entered Paris, exiled Napoléon to Elba and restored the House of Bourbon to the French throne at the Congress of Vienna.

In early 1815 Napoléon escaped from the Mediterranean island, landed in southern France and gathered a large army as he marched towards Paris. On 1 June he reclaimed the throne at celebrations held at the Champ de Mars. But his reign came to an end just three weeks later

THE KINDEST CUT

Hanging, then drawing and quartering – roping the victim's limbs to four oxen, which then ran in four different directions – was once the favoured method of publicly executing commoners. In a bid to make public executions more humane, French physician Joseph Ignace Guillotin (1738–1814) came up with the guillotine.

Several tests on dead bodies down the line, highwayman Nicolas Jacques Pelletie was the first in France to have his head sliced off by the 2m-odd falling blade on 25 April 1792 on place de Grève (today's place de l'Hôtel de Ville) in Paris. During the Reign of Terror, at least 17,000 met their death by guillotine.

By the time the last person in France to be guillotined (murderer Hamida Djan-doubi in Marseille) was given the chop in 1977 (behind closed doors – the last public execution was in 1939), the lethal contraption had been sufficiently refined to slice off a head in 2/100 of a second. France abolished capital punishment in 1981.

1589

Henri IV, the first Bourbon king, ascends the throne after renouncing Protestantism; '*Paris vaut bien une messe*' (Paris is well worth a Mass), he is reputed to have said upon taking communion.

1598

Henri IV gives French Protestants freedom of conscience with the Edict of Nantes – much to the horror of staunchly Catholic Paris, where many refuse to acknowledge the forward-thinking document.

1635

Cardinal Richelieu, de facto ruler during the reign of Henri IV's son, Louis XIII, founds the Académie Française, the first and best known of France's five institutes of arts and sciences.

1643

The Roi Soleil (Sun King), Louis XIV, all of five years old, assumes the French throne. In 1682 he moves his court – lock, stock and satin slipper – from Paris' Palais des Tuileries to Versailles.

when his forces were defeated at Waterloo in Belgium. Napoléon was exiled again, this time to the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic, where he died in 1821. In 1840 his remains were moved to Paris' Église du Dôme.

Although reactionary in some ways – he re-established slavery in France's colonies in 1802, for example – Napoléon instituted a number of important reforms, including a reorganisation of the judicial system; the promulgation of a new legal code, the Code Napoléon (or civil code), which forms the basis of the French legal system to this day; and the establishment of a new educational system. More importantly, he preserved the essence of the changes brought about by the Revolution.

A struggle between extreme monarchists seeking a return to the *ancien régime*, people who saw the changes wrought by the Revolution as irreversible, and the radicals of the poor working-class neighbourhoods of Paris dominated the reign of Louis XVIII (r 1815–24). His successor Charles X responded to the conflict with ineptitude and was overthrown in the so-called July Revolution of 1830. Those who were killed in the accompanying Paris street battles are buried in vaults under the Colonne de Juillet in the centre of place de la Bastille. Louis-Philippe, a constitutional monarch of bourgeois sympathies who followed him, was subsequently chosen as ruler by parliament, only to be ousted by the 1848 Revolution.

The Second Republic was established and elections brought in Napoléon's inept nephew, the German-reared (and accented) Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, as president. In 1851 he staged a coup d'état and proclaimed himself Emperor Napoléon III of the Second Empire, which lasted until 1870.

France enjoyed significant economic growth at this time. Paris was transformed under urban planner Baron Haussmann (1809–91), who created the 12 huge boulevards radiating from the Arc de Triomphe. Napoléon III threw glittering parties at the royal palace in Compiègne, and breathed in fashionable sea air at Biarritz and Deauville.

Like his uncle before him, Napoléon III embroiled France in a number of costly conflicts, including the disastrous Crimean War (1854–56). In 1870 Otto von Bismarck goaded Napoléon III into declaring war on Prussia. Within months the thoroughly unprepared French army was defeated and the emperor taken prisoner.

The Belle Époque

Although it would usher in the glittering belle époque (beautiful age), there was nothing very attractive about the start of the Third Republic. Born as a provisional government of national defence in September 1870, it was quickly besieged by the Prussians, who laid siege to Paris

1756–63

The Seven Years War against Britain and Prussia is one of a series of ruinous wars pursued by Louis XV, leading to the loss of France's colonies in Canada, the West Indies and India.

1789

The French Revolution begins when a mob arms itself with weapons taken from the Hôtel des Invalides and storms the prison at Bastille, freeing a total of just seven prisoners.

1793

Louis XVI is tried and convicted as citizen 'Louis Capet' (as all kings since Hugh Capet were declared to have ruled illegally) and executed; Marie-Antoinette's turn comes nine months later.

1795

A five-man delegation of moderate republicans led by Paul Barras sets itself up as the *Directoire* (Directory) and rules the First Republic for five years.

and demanded National Assembly elections be held. Unfortunately, the first move made by the resultant monarchist-controlled assembly was to ratify the Treaty of Frankfurt. The harsh terms of the treaty – a huge war indemnity and surrender of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine – prompted immediate revolt (known as the Paris Commune), during which several thousand Communards were killed and another 20,000 executed. The Wall of the Federalists in Paris' Cimetière du Père Lachaise serves as a deathly reminder of the bloodshed.

The belle époque launched art nouveau architecture, a whole field of artistic 'isms' from Impressionism onwards, and advances in science and engineering, including the construction of the first metro line in Paris. World Exhibitions were held in the capital in 1889 (showcased by the Eiffel Tower) and again in 1901 in the purpose-built Petit Palais.

But all was not well in the republic. France was consumed with a desire for revenge after its defeat by Germany, and looking for scapegoats. The so-called Dreyfus Affair began in 1894 when a Jewish army captain named Alfred Dreyfus was accused of betraying military secrets to Germany; he was then court-martialled and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil's Island in French Guiana. Liberal politicians and writers succeeded in having the case reopened despite bitter opposition from

A DATE WITH THE REVOLUTION

Along with standardising France's system of weights and measures with the almost universal metric system, the revolutionary government adopted a new, 'more rational' calendar from which all 'superstitious' associations (ie saints' days and mythology) were removed. Year 1 began on 22 September 1792, the day the First Republic was proclaimed.

The names of the 12 months – Vendémaire, Brumaire, Frimaire, Nivôse, Pluviôse, Ventôse, Germinal, Floréal, Prairial, Messidor, Thermidor and Fructidor – were chosen according to the seasons. The autumn months, for instance, were Vendémaire (derived from *vendange*, grape harvest), Brumaire (from *brume*, mist or fog) and Frimaire (from *frimas*, wintry weather). In turn, each month was divided into three 10-day 'weeks' called *décades*, the last day of which was a rest day. The five remaining days of the year were used to celebrate Virtue, Genius, Labour, Opinion and Rewards. These festivals were initially called *sans-culottides* in honour of the *sans-culottes*, the extreme revolutionaries who wore pantaloons rather than the short breeches favoured by the upper classes.

While the republican calendar worked well in theory, it caused no end of confusion for France in its communications and trade abroad because the months and days kept changing in relation to those of the Gregorian calendar. The revolutionary calendar was abandoned and the old system restored in 1806 by Napoléon Bonaparte.

1799

Napoléon Bonaparte overthrows the Directory and seizes control of the government in a *coup d'état*, opening the doors to 16 years of despotic rule, victory and then defeat on the battlefield.

1815

British and Prussian forces under the Duke of Wellington defeat Napoléon at Waterloo; he is again sent into exile, to a remote island in the South Atlantic where he dies six years later.



» Napoléon and family in wax, Musée Grévin, Paris

the army command, right-wing politicians and many Catholic groups – and Dreyfus was vindicated in 1900. This resulted in more rigorous civilian control of the military and, in 1905, the legal separation of Church and State.

The Two World Wars

Central to France's entry into war against Austria-Hungary and Germany had been its desire to regain Alsace and Lorraine, lost to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War – but it would prove to be a costly piece of real estate in terms of human life. By the time the armistice was signed in November 1918, some 1.3 million French soldiers had been killed and almost one million crippled. At the Battle of Verdun alone, the French (under the command of General Philippe Pétain) and the Germans each lost about 400,000 men.

The 1920s and '30s saw Paris as a centre of the avant-garde, with painters pushing into new fields of art such as cubism and surrealism, Le Corbusier rewriting the textbook for architecture, foreign writers such as Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce drawn by the city's liberal atmosphere (and cheap booze), and nightlife establishing a cutting-edge reputation for everything from jazz clubs to striptease.

The naming of Adolf Hitler as Germany's chancellor in 1933 signalled the end of a decade of compromise between France and Germany over border guarantees. Initially the French tried to appease Hitler, but two days after Germany invaded Poland in 1939 France joined Britain in declaring war on Germany. By June 1940 France had capitulated. The Maginot Line (see p912) had proved useless, with German armoured divisions outflanking it by going through Belgium.

The Germans divided France into a zone under direct German rule (along the western coast and the north, including Paris), and a puppet-state based in the spa town of Vichy and led by General Pétain, the ageing WWI hero of the Battle of Verdun. The Vichy regime was viciously anti-Semitic, and local police proved very helpful to the Nazis in rounding up French Jews and others for deportation to Auschwitz and other death camps.

The underground movement known as the Résistance (Resistance), or Maquis, whose active members never amounted to more than about 5% of the French population, engaged in such activities as sabotaging railways, collecting intelligence for the Allies, helping Allied airmen who had been shot down, and publishing anti-German leaflets. The vast majority of the rest of the population did little or nothing to resist the occupiers or assist their victims, or collaborated.

An 80-km-long stretch of beach (see the boxed text, p211) was the site of the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944, when more than 100,000 Allied

A full 20% of all Frenchmen – one out of every five males – between 20 and 45 years of age were killed in WWI.

WWI

1851

Louis Napoléon leads a coup d'état and proclaims himself Emperor Napoléon III of the Second Empire (1852–70), a period of significant economic growth and building under Baron Haussmann.

1858

A 14-year-old peasant girl in Lourdes sees the Virgin Mary in 18 visions that come to her in a grotto; the sleepy market town in the Pyrenees later becomes a world pilgrimage site.

1871

The Treaty of Frankfurt is signed, the harsh terms of which (a 5-billion-franc war indemnity, surrender of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine) prompt immediate revolt.

1889

The Eiffel Tower is completed in time for the opening of the Exposition Universelle (World Exhibition) but is vilified in the press and on the street as the 'metal asparagus'.

Published posthumously in 2004, the award-winning *Suite Française* by Ukrainian-born author Irène Némirovsky, who was murdered at Auschwitz in 1942, evokes the horror of Nazi-occupied Paris from June 1940 until July 1941.

troops stormed the coastline to liberate most of Normandy and Brittany. Paris was liberated on 25 August by a force spearheaded by Free French units, sent in ahead of the Americans so the French would have the honour of liberating their own capital.

The war ruined France. More than one-third of industrial production fed the German war machine during WWII, the occupiers requisitioning practically everything that wasn't (and was) nailed down: ferrous and nonferrous metals, statues, iron grills, zinc bar tops, coal, leather, textiles and chemicals. Agriculture, strangled by the lack of raw materials, fell by 25%.

In their retreat, the Germans burned bridges (2600 destroyed) and the Allied bombardments tore up railroad tracks (40,000km). The roadways hadn't been maintained since 1939, ports were damaged, and nearly half a million buildings and 60,000 factories were destroyed. The French had to pay for the needs of the occupying soldiers to the tune of 400 million francs a day, prompting an inflation rip tide.

Rebuilding & the Loss of the Colonies

The magnitude of France's postwar economic devastation required a strong central government with broad powers to rebuild the country's

THE MAGINOT LINE

The Ligne Maginot, named after France's minister of war from 1929 to 1932, was one of the most spectacular blunders of WWII. This elaborate, mostly subterranean defence network, built between 1930 and 1940 (and, in the history of military architecture, second only to the Great Wall of China in sheer size), was the pride of prewar France. It included everything France's finest military architects thought would be needed to defend the nation in a 'modern war' of poison gas, tanks and aeroplanes: reinforced concrete bunkers, subterranean lines of supply and communication, minefields, antitank canals, floodable basins and even artillery emplacements that popped out of the ground to fire and then disappeared. The only things visible above ground were firing posts and lookout towers. The line stretched along the Franco-German frontier from the Swiss border all the way to Belgium where, for political and budgetary reasons, it stopped. The Maginot Line even had a slogan: *'Ils ne passeront pas'* (They won't get through).

'They' – the Germans – never did. Rather than attack the Maginot Line straight on, Hitler's armoured divisions simply circled around through Belgium and invaded France across its unprotected northern frontier. They then attacked the Maginot Line from the rear.

1894

Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus is convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on trumped-up charges of spying for Germany; he is later exonerated despite widespread conservative opposition.

1903

The world's biggest sporting event after the Olympics and the World Cup sprints around France for the first time; Tour de France riders pedal throughout the night to cover 2500km in 19 days.

1904

Colonial rivalry between France and Britain in Africa ends with the Entente Cordiale ('Cordial Understanding'), marking the start of a cooperation that continues, more or less, to this day.

1905

The emotions aroused by the Dreyfus Affair and the interference of the Catholic Church lead to the promulgation of *laïcité* (secularism), the legal separation of church and state.

WWII

Since the end of WWII France has been one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Follow its movements at www.un.org/docs/sc.

industrial and commercial base. Soon after liberation most banks, insurance companies, car manufacturers and energy-producing companies fell under government control. Other businesses remained in private hands, the objective being to combine the efficiency of state planning with the dynamism of private initiative. But progress was slow. By 1947 rationing remained in effect and France had to turn to the USA for loans as part of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe.

One of the aims of the plan was to stabilise postwar Europe financially and politically, thus thwarting the expansion of Soviet power. As the Iron Curtain fell over Eastern Europe, the pro-Stalinist bent of France's Communist Party put it in a politically untenable position. Seeking at once to exercise power within the government and at the same time oppose its measures as insufficiently Marxist, the communists found themselves on the losing end of disputes involving the colonies, workers' demands and American aid. In 1947 they were booted out of government.

The economy gathered steam in the 1950s. The French government invested in hydroelectric and nuclear-power plants, oil and gas exploration, petrochemical refineries, steel production, naval construction, auto factories and building construction to accommodate a baby boom and consumer goods. The future at home was looking brighter; the situation of *la France d'outre-mer* (overseas France) was another story altogether.

France's humiliation at the hands of the Germans had not been lost on its restive colonies. As the war economy tightened its grip, native-born people, poorer to begin with, noticed that they were bearing the brunt of the pain. In North Africa the Algerians coalesced around a movement for greater autonomy, which blossomed into a full-scale independence movement by the end of the war. The Japanese moved into strategically important Indochina in 1940. The Vietnamese resistance movement that developed quickly took on an anti-French, nationalistic tone, setting the stage for Vietnam's eventual independence.

The 1950s spelled the end of French colonialism. When Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945, nationalist Ho Chi Minh launched a push for an autonomous Vietnam that became a drive for independence. Under the brilliant General Giap, the Vietnamese perfected a form of guerrilla warfare that proved highly effective against the French army. After their defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the French withdrew from Indochina.

The struggle for Algerian independence was nastier. Technically a French *département*, Algeria was in effect ruled by a million or so French settlers who wished at all costs to protect their privileges. Heads stuck firmly in the Saharan sands (especially in the south, where the

1918

The armistice ending WWI signed at Fôret de Compiègne near Paris sees the return of lost territories (Alsace and Lorraine), but the war brought about the loss of more than a million French soldiers.

1920s

Paris sparkles as the centre of the avant-garde. The luxurious Train Bleu (Blue Train) makes its first run, and Sylvia Beach of the Shakespeare & Company bookshop publishes James Joyce's *Ulysses*.



» WWI cemetery, Verdun

oil was), the colonial community and its supporters in the army and the right wing refused all Algerian demands for political and economic equality.

The Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) was brutal. Nationalist rebel attacks were met with summary executions, inquisitions, torture and massacres, which only made Algerians more determined to gain their independence. The government responded with half-hearted reform and reorganisation programs that failed to address the fact that most people didn't want to be part of France.

International pressure on France to pull out of Algeria came from the UN, the USSR and the USA, while *pieds noirs* (literally 'black feet', as Algerian-born French people are known in France), elements of the military and extreme right-wingers became increasingly enraged at what they saw as defeatism in dealing with the problem. A plot to overthrow the French government and replace it with a military-style regime was narrowly avoided when General Charles de Gaulle, France's undersecretary of war who had fled Paris for London in 1940 after France capitulated and had spent more than a dozen years in opposition to the postwar Fourth Republic, agreed to assume the presidency in 1958.

De Gaulle's initial attempts at reform – according the Algerians political equality and recognising their right in principle to self-determination – only infuriated right-wingers without quenching the Algerian thirst for independence. Following a failed coup attempt by military officers in 1961, the Organisation de l'Armée Secrète (OAS; a group of French settlers and sympathisers opposed to Algerian independence) resorted to terrorism. It tried to assassinate de Gaulle several times and in 1961 violence broke out on the streets of Paris. Police attacked Algerian demonstrators, killing more than 100 people. Algeria was granted independence the following year.

The Road to Prosperity & Europe

By the late 1960s de Gaulle, president of the Fifth Republic for almost a decade by then, was appearing more and more like yesterday's man. Loss of the colonies, a surge in immigration and the rise in unemployment had weakened his government. De Gaulle's government by decree was starting to gall the anti-authoritarian baby-boomer generation, now at university and agitating for change. Students reading Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich found much to admire in Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the black struggle for civil rights in America, and vociferously denounced the war in Vietnam.

Student protests of 1968 climaxed with a brutal overreaction by police to a protest meeting at the Sorbonne, Paris' most renowned

1939	1944	1949	1951
Nazi Germany occupies France and divides it into a zone under direct German occupation (along the north and western coasts) and a puppet state led by General Pétain and based in the spa town of Vichy.	Normandy and Brittany are the first to be liberated by Allied troops following the D-Day landings in June, followed by Paris on 25 August by a force spearheaded by Free French units.	France signs the Atlantic Pact uniting North America and Western Europe in a mutual defence alliance (NATO); the Council of Europe, of which France is part, is born.	The fear of communism and a resurgent Germany prompts the first steps towards European integration with the European Coal and Steel Community and military accords three years later.

university. Overnight, public opinion turned in favour of the students, while the students themselves occupied the Sorbonne and erected barricades in the Latin Quarter. Within days a general strike by 10 million workers countrywide paralysed France.

But such comradeship between workers and students did not last long. While the former wanted a greater share of the consumer market, the latter wanted to destroy it. After much hesitancy de Gaulle took advantage of this division by appealing to people's fear of anarchy. Just as the country seemed on the brink of revolution and an overthrow of the Fifth Republic, stability returned. The government immediately decentralised the higher-education system and followed through in the 1970s with a wave of other reforms (lowering the voting age to 18, instituting legalised abortion and so on). De Gaulle meanwhile resigned from office in 1969 after losing an important referendum on regionalisation, and suffered a fatal heart attack the following year.

Georges Pompidou, prime minister under de Gaulle, stepped onto the presidential podium in 1969. Despite embarking on an ambitious modernisation program, investing in aerospace, telecommunications and nuclear power, he failed to stave off inflation and social unrest following the global oil crisis of 1973 and died the following year.

In 1974 Valéry Giscard d'Estaing inherited a deteriorating economic climate and sharp divisions between the left and the right. Hampered by a lack of media savvy and what was perceived as an arrogant demeanour, d'Estaing proved unpopular. His friendship with emperor and alleged cannibal Jean-Bédel Bokassa of the Central African Republic did little to win him friends, and in 1981 he was ousted by long-time head of the Parti Socialiste (PS; Socialist Party), François Mitterrand.

Despite France's first socialist president instantly alienating the business community by setting out to nationalise 36 privately owned banks,

Peep into the presidential palace and have a good old nose around at www.elysee.fr.

THE BIRTH OF THE BIKINI

Almost called *atome* (atom) rather than bikini, after its pinprick size, the scanty little two-piece bathing suit was the 1946 creation of Cannes fashion designer Jacques Heim and automotive engineer Louis Réard.

Top-and-bottom swimsuits had existed for centuries, but it was the French duo who both made them briefer than brief and plumped for the name 'bikini' – after Bikini, an atoll in the Marshall Islands chosen by the USA in the same year as the test-ground for atomic bombs.

Once wrapped top and bottom around the curvaceous 1950s sex-bomb Brigitte Bardot on St-Tropez' Plage de Pampelonne, there was no looking back. The bikini was here to stay.

1946–62

French colonialism ends with war in Indochina (1946–54) followed by the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62), brought to a close with the signing of the Accord d'Évian (Evian Accord) in Évian-les-Bains.

1966

France withdraws from NATO's joint military command in 1966; it has maintained an independent arsenal of nuclear weapons since 1960. A year later NATO moves out of its headquarters near Paris.

1968

Large-scale anti-authoritarian student protests (known since as 'May 1968') aimed at de Gaulle's style of government by decree escalate into a countrywide protest that eventually brings down the president.

1977

The Centre Pompidou, the first of a string of *grands projets* – huge public edifices through which French leaders seek to immortalise themselves – opens to great controversy near Les Halles in Paris.

The Death of French Culture (Donald Morrison; 2010), the book that grew out of the (in)famous 2001 *Time* magazine article, has this American in Paris pondering on past glory and suggesting that France and its culture no longer speak to the world. Thought-provoking.

industrial groups and other parts of the economy, Mitterrand did give France something of a sparkle. Potent symbols of France's advanced technological savvy – the Minitel, a proto-personal computer in everyone's home, and high-speed TGV train service between Paris and Lyon – were launched in 1980 and 1981 respectively; a clutch of *grands projets* (p945) were embarked upon in the French capital; and the biggest commercial centre in Europe (at the time), Les Quatre Temps, opened in 1981 at La Défense, the futuristic skyscraper district 3km west of Paris. The death penalty was abolished, homosexuality was legalised, a 39-hour work week was instituted, annual holiday time was upped from four to five weeks and the right to retire at 60 was guaranteed.

However, by 1986 the economy was weakening and in parliamentary elections that year the right-wing opposition, led by Jacques Chirac (mayor of Paris since 1977), won a majority in the National Assembly. For the next two years Mitterrand worked with a prime minister and cabinet from the opposition, an unprecedented arrangement known as *cohabitation*. The extreme-right Front National (FN; National Front) meanwhile quietly gained ground by loudly blaming France's economic woes on immigration.

Presidential elections in 1995 ushered Chirac (an ailing Mitterrand did not run and died the following year) into the Élysée Palace. Whiz-kid foreign minister Alain Juppé was appointed prime minister and several women were placed in top cabinet positions. However, Chirac's attempts to reform France's colossal public sector in order to meet the criteria of European Monetary Union (EMU) were met with the largest protests since 1968, and his decision to resume nuclear testing on the Polynesian island of Mururoa and a nearby atoll was the focus of worldwide outrage. Always the maverick, Chirac called

GAULLISH FACTS

- » Charles de Gaulle was a record breaker: according to the *Guinness Book of Records* he survived more assassination attempts – 32, to be precise – than anyone else in the world.
- » The present constitution, known as the Fifth Republic and the 11th since 1789, was instituted by good old de Gaulle in 1958.
- » He really did say that thing about cheese, opinion and his compatriots: '*On ne peut pas rassembler à froid un pays qui compte 265 spécialités de fromages.*' (You cannot easily bring together a country that counts 265 types of cheese.)

Find out what else he said and did at www.charles-de-gaulle.org.

1981

The superspeedy TGV makes its first commercial journey from Paris to Lyon, breaking all speed records to complete the train journey in two hours instead of six.

1989

President Mitterrand's *grand projet*, Opéra Bastille, opens to mark the bicentennial of the French Revolution; IM Pei's love-it-or-leave-it Grande Pyramide is unveiled at the Louvre.

1994

The 50km-long Channel Tunnel linking France with Britain opens after seven years of hard graft by 10,000 workers; a year later the first land link since the last ice age announces a £925-million loss.

1995

After twice serving as prime minister, Jacques Chirac becomes president of France, winning popular acclaim for his direct words and actions in matters relating to the EU and the war in Bosnia.

early parliamentary elections in 1997 – only for his party, the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR; Rally for the Republic), to lose out to a coalition of socialists, communists and greens. Another period of *cohabitation* ensued (this time with Chirac on the other side) that would last well into the new millennium.

The presidential elections in 2002 surprised everybody. Not only did the first round of voting see left-wing PS leader Lionel Jospin eliminated, it also saw the FN's racist demagogue Jean-Marie Le Pen – legendary for his dismissal of the Holocaust as a 'mere detail of history' in the 1980s and his 'inequality of races' jargon in the late 1990s – scoop 17% of the national vote. In the fortnight preceding the subsequent run-off ballot, demonstrators took to the streets with cries of 'Vote for the crook, not the fascist' ('crook' referring to the various party financing scandals floating around Chirac). On the big day itself, left-wing voters – without a candidate of their own – hedged their bets with 'lesser-of-two-evils' Chirac to give him 82% of votes. Chirac's landslide victory was echoed in parliamentary elections a month later when the president-backed coalition UMP (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) won 354 of the 577 parliamentary seats, leaving Le Pen's FN without a single seat in parliament and ending years of *cohabitation*.

The same year France, one of the six founding members of the European Economic Community (precursor of the European Union) in 1958, adopted the euro as its currency in place of the franc, once again assuring its central position in Europe.

1998

After resuming nuclear testing in the South Pacific in the early 1990s, France signs the worldwide test-ban treaty, bringing an end to French nuclear testing once and for all.

2000

An Air France Concorde bound for New York bursts into flames just after take-off at Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport and crashes, killing all 109 people on board and four on the ground.

2001

Socialist Bertrand Delanoë becomes the first openly gay mayor of Paris (and of any European capital); he is wounded in a knife attack by a homophobic assailant the following year.

2002

The French franc, first minted in 1360, is thrown onto the scrap heap of history as the country adopts the euro as its official currency along with 14 other EU member-states.



The French

Superchic, stylish, sexy, charming, arrogant, rude, bureaucratic, sexist, chauvinistic... France is a country whose people have attracted more stubborn myths and stereotypes than any other in Europe, and, over the centuries, dozens of tags, true or otherwise, have been pinned on the garlic-eating, beret-wearing, *sacrebleu*-swearing French. (The French, by the way, don't wear berets or use old chestnuts such as '*sacrebleu*' anymore.) Sit in a café some afternoon and you'll soon hear the gentle expressions of surprise favoured by Parisians these days as they slip on dog droppings (a frequent sight on most pavements). '*Merde*' (shit) is quite popular.

Suckers for tradition, the French are slow to embrace new ideas and technologies: it took the country an age to embrace the internet, clinging on for dear life to their own at-the-time-innovative Minitel system for eons. Yet the French are also incredibly innovative – a dichotomy reflected in every facet of French life: they drink and smoke more than anyone else, yet live longer. They eat like kings, but are not fat... how so very enviable.

Superiority Complex

Most people are extremely proud to be French and are staunchly nationalistic to boot, a result of the country's republican stance that places nationality – rather than religion, for example – at the top of the self-identity list. This has created an overwhelmingly self-confident nation, both culturally and intellectually, that invariably comes across as a French superiority complex.

Contrary to popular belief, many French speak a foreign language fairly well, travel and are happy to use their language skills should the need arise. Of course, if monolingual English-speakers don't at least try to speak French, there is no way proud French linguists will let on they speak fluent English! French men, incidentally, deem an English gal's heavily accented French as irresistibly sexy as many people deem a Frenchman speaking English. Hard to believe, but true.

Naturally Sexy

On the subject of sex, not all French men ooze romance or light Gitane cigarettes all day. Nor are they as civilised about adultery as French cinema would have you believe. Adultery, illegal in France until 1975, was actually grounds for automatic divorce until as late as mid-2004.

Kissing is an integral part of French life. (The expression 'French kissing' doesn't exist in French, incidentally.) That said, put a Parisian in Provence and there's no saying they will know when to stop. Countrywide, people who know each other reasonably well, really well, a tad or barely at all greet each other with a glancing peck on each cheek. Southern France aside (where everyone kisses everyone), two men rarely kiss (unless they are related or artists) but always shake hands. Boys and girls start kissing as soon as they're out of nappies, or so it seems.

Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong: What Makes the French so French ask Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow in their witty, well-written and at times downright comical musings on the French.

FRENCH KISSING

Kissing French-style is not completely straightforward, 'how many' and 'which side first' potentially being problematic. In Paris it is definitely two: unless parties are related, very close friends or haven't seen each other in an age, anything more is deemed affected. That said, in certain trendy 20-something circles, friends swap three or four cheek-skimming kisses, as do many young teenagers at school.

Travel south and the *bisous* (kisses) multiply, three or four being the norm in Provence. The bits of France neighbouring Switzerland around Lake Geneva tend to be three-kiss country (in keeping with Swiss habits); and in the Loire Valley it is four. Corsicans, bizarrely, stick to two but kiss left cheek first – which can lead to locked lips given that everyone else in France starts with the right cheek.

Lifestyle

Be a fly on the wall in the 5th-floor bourgeois apartment of Monsieur et Madame Tout le Monde and you'll see them dunking croissants in bowls of *café au lait* for breakfast, buying a baguette every day from the bakery (Monsieur nibbles the top off on his way home) and recycling nothing bar a few glass bottles.

They go to the movies once a month, work precisely 35 hours a week (many French still toil 39 hours or more a week – employers can enforce a 39-hour work week for a negotiable extra cost), and enjoy five weeks' holiday and five bank (public) holidays a year. The couple view the web-radio production company their 24-year-old son set up and heads in Paris with a mix of pride, amusement and pure scepticism. Their 20-year-old daughter is a student: France's overcrowded state-run universities are free and open to anyone who passes the *baccalauréat*, although Sarkozy had a stab at changing this by giving universities the autonomy to select students and seek outside funding.

Madame buys a load of hot-gossip weekly magazines, Monsieur meets his mates to play boules, and August is the *only* month to summer holiday (with the rest of France). Dodging dog poo on pavements is a sport practised from birth and everything goes on the *carte bleue* (credit or debit card) when shopping. This *is* the society, after all, that microchipped credit cards long before anyone else even dreamt of scrapping the swipe-and-sign system. The couple have a landlord: with a tradition of renting rather than buying, home ownership is low (57% of households own their own home; the rest rent).

Les Femmes

Women were granted suffrage in 1945, but until 1964 a woman needed her husband's permission to open a bank account or get a passport. Younger French women in particular are quite outspoken and emancipated. But this self-confidence has yet to translate into equality in the workplace, where women hold few senior and management positions. Sexual harassment is addressed with a law imposing financial penalties on the offender. A great achievement in the last decade has been *Parité*, the law requiring political parties to fill 50% of their slates in all elections with female candidates.

Abortion is legal during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, girls under 16 not needing parental consent provided they are accompanied by an adult of their choice: 30 abortions take place in France for every 100 live births.

Above all else French women are known for their natural chic, style and class. And there's no doubt that contemporary French women are sassier than ever. Take the Rykiel women: in the 1970s, legendary Parisian

knitwear designer Sonia Rykiel designed the skin-tight, boob-hugging sweater worn with no bra beneath. In the new millennium, daughter Nathalie created Rykiel Woman, a sensual label embracing everything from lingerie to sex toys and aimed squarely at women who know what they want. The up-to-the-minute duo blogs under the pseudonym Dita du Flore (www.rykielles.com), has an e-shop (www.soniarykiel.com) and is on Facebook.

Linguistic Patriotism

Speaking a language other than their own is an emotional affair for the French, memorably illustrated a few years back when the then French president Jacques Chirac walked out of an EU summit session after a

FRANCE'S NORTH–SOUTH DIVIDE

No film better illustrates what southerners think of those from 'the sticks' in the far north than Dany Boon's *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (Welcome to the Sticks; 2008). With gags a minute, the warm-hearted comedy is a poignant commentary on France's north–south divide – eagerly lapped up by the French, curious to see if Boon's cinematic portrayal of regional prejudices matched up to reality.

For starters, the weather in the cold rainy north is revolting ('1°C in summer and down to -40°C in winter'): the north for a southerner is pretty much anything north of Lyon. So no surprise that post-office chief Philippe, upon setting off north from his native Salon-de-Provence on the sun-drenched Côte d'Azur, dons several jumpers, puffer jacket and scarf as he bids a dramatic farewell to bronzed wife Julie. Bizarrely, the weather doesn't change until he passes the 'Nord-Pas de Calais' sign – at which point it doesn't just rain but slashes down beyond windscreen-wiper control. Even the gendarme on the autoroute, upon stopping him for driving too slowly, lets him off with a sympathetic smile and his deepest condolences when he hears where he's heading: Bergues, a dumpy ex-mining town of 4300 inhabitants, 9km from Dunkirk. (The place exists, is not dumpy, nor as grey and grim as southerners suppose, and is suddenly all the rage as visitors flock to see its post office, its municipal bell tower, the central square with its chip van and so on.) *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* is a kaleidoscope of comic scenes that slowly chip away at the deeply entrenched prejudices surrounding this northern land of redundant coal mines and its unemployed, impoverished, pale, unhealthy and 'uncultured' inhabitants who drink too much beer and speak like this – *Ej t'ermarci inne banes* (that means *Merci beaucoup*).

Yes, their thick Ch'timi dialect (old Picard peppered with Flemish) is incomprehensible to outsiders. Yes, they dunk stinky Maroilles cheese and bread in *chicorée café* (chicory-flavoured instant coffee) for breakfast. Yes, they skip the traditional French three-course lunch for an al fresco round of *frites fricadelle*, *sauce picadilly* (chips 'n' meatballs; never ask what's in the balls) from the local *baraque à frites* (chip van) – eaten with their fingers. Yes, their long, sandy and windy beaches are brilliant for *le char à voile* (sand yachting). And yes, their very nickname – *les Ch'tis* – was borne out of prejudice during WWI when French soldiers mocked the thickly accented way their northern comrades spoke – '*ch'est ti, ch'est mi*' (*c'est toi, c'est moi* – it's you, it's me), hence 'Ch'ti'.

The north and its regional characteristics are no mystery to director Boon, a born-and-bred northerner who grew up in Armentières, near Lille, on bread-and-butter dishes like *tarte au Maroilles*, *chicons au gratin* (oven-baked chicory, *chicons* being the Ch'ti word for 'chicories') and *carbonnade flamande* (beef stew). His father was an Algerian-born bus driver, his mother a cleaner and he is one of France's best-known stand-up comics and directors and, since the film, best-paid actors – he plays the buffoonish postal worker, Antoine. Indeed, if anyone is best placed to speak of *les Ch'tis* and their homeland, it's Boon, whose lovable, huge-hearted character in the film says it all: 'An outsider who comes to the north cries twice, once when he arrives, and once when he leaves.'

A MADAME FROM BIRTH NICOLA WILLIAMS

'About time too', a feminist anywhere else on the planet would argue. Indeed, it is only now that French women have decided no more 'Mademoiselle', meaning 'Miss', 'not married', 'virgin', 'sexually available' and so on, says Paris-based feminist group Les Chiennes de Garde (meaning 'guard dogs', or rather, 'guard bitches'). The group has launched a petition for the term 'Mademoiselle' to be eradicated from the administrative and political arena. It also wants the standard 'maiden name' box struck off official forms and documents.

'Mademoiselle' originates from the medieval word '*damoiselle*', meaning a young upper-class girl (male equivalents were called '*damoisel*'). Later merged with '*ma*' to denote an unmarried woman, the term was tantamount to 'sad old spinster who can't find a husband' in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th century, novelist Adolphe Belot borrowed the term to depict a frigid wife in *Mademoiselle Giraud, ma Femme*.

So the fight is on to become a Madame from birth. Already a Madame, I, for one, not to mention practically all my 30-something-with-kids girlfriends, am delighted if someone dares call me 'Mademoiselle'. Despite the kids in tow, dirty washing and first wrinkle, it means I still look young.

fellow countryman had the audacity to address the meeting in English. 'Don't speak English!' was *Le Monde's* headline the next day, while the French blogosphere seethed with debate on linguistic patriotism: 'Open your eyes, Mr President, you are on another planet', 'it is a long time since French was the language of the international arena' taunted modern-day French bloggers, most of whom write in English.

Current president Nicolas Sarkozy is faring marginally better than his monolingual predecessor. Yet the bottom line is Sarkozy sticks to what he knows best in public, so much so that the couple of lines he has uttered in English were instantly plastered over the internet as a video link and swiftly went viral.

With English words like 'weekend', 'jogging', 'stop' and 'OK' firmly entrenched in daily French usage, language purists might just have lost the battle. One look at the many Anglo-American shop and restaurant signs featured in the online Musée des Horreurs (Museum of Horrors) on the website of the Paris-based Défense de la Langue Française (DLF; Defence of the French Language; www.langue-francaise.org, in French) says it all.

French was the main language of the EU until 1995 when Sweden and Finland came into the EU fold. French broadcasting laws restrict the amount of air time radio and TV stations can devote to non-French music, but little can be done to restrict who airs what on the internet.

Multiculturalism

The face of France is multicultural (immigrants make up 7.4% of the population), yet its republican code, while inclusive and nondiscriminatory, has been criticised for doing little to accommodate a multicultural society (and, interestingly, none of the members of France's National Assembly represents the immigrant population, first or second generation). Nothing reflects this dichotomy better than the law, in place since 2004, banning the Islamic headscarf, Jewish skullcap, crucifix and other religious symbols in French schools (see p900).

Some 90% of the French Muslim community – Europe's largest – are noncitizens. Most are illegal immigrants living in poverty-stricken *bidonvilles* (tinpot towns) around Paris, Lyon and other metropolitan centres. Many are unemployed (youth unemployment in many suburbs is 40%) and face little prospect of getting a job.

Fewer French couples are marrying (3% less each year). Those that do marry are doing so later (women at the age of 29, men at 31) and waiting longer to have an average of two children. Like everywhere else in Europe, divorce is rising (49% of marriages end in divorce compared to 30% in 1985).

PÉTANQUE

France's traditional ball games include *pétanque* and the more formal *boules*, which has a 70-page rule book. Both are played by men on a gravel pitch. In the Basque Country, *pelote Basque* (*pelota*) is the thing to do with French balls.

Multiculturalism is a dominant feature of French football, with more than half of the 23 players in the 2010 World Cup being of African, West Indian, Algerian or other non-French origin. The country's golden boy of football, Marseille-born midfielder ace Zinedine Zidane (b 1972), now retired, is a classic example. The son of Algerian immigrants, he wooed the nation with a sparkling career of goal-scoring headers and extraordinary footwork that unfortunately ended with him head-butting an Italian player during the 2006 World Cup final. But such was the power of his humble Marseillais grin (since used to advertise Adidas sports gear, Volvic mineral water and Christian Dior fashion) that the French nation instantly forgave him.

Good Sports

Most French wouldn't be seen dead walking down the street in trainers and tracksuits. But contrary to appearances, they love sport. Shaved-leg cyclists toil up Mont Ventoux, football fans fill stadiums and anyone who can flit off for the weekend to ski or snowboard.

Les 24 Heures du Mans and the F1 Grand Prix in Monte Carlo are the world's raciest dates in motor sports; the French Open in Paris in late May to early June is the second of the year's four grand-slam tennis tournaments; and the Tour de France is – indisputably – the world's most prestigious bicycle race. Bringing together 189 of the world's top male cyclists (21 teams of nine) and 15 million spectators in July each year for a spectacular 3000-plus-kilometre cycle around the country, the three-week race always labours through the Alps and Pyrenees and finishes on Paris' Champs-Élysées. The route in between changes each year but wherever it goes, the French systematically turn out in their droves – armed with table, chairs and picnic hamper – to make a day of it. The serpentine publicity caravan preceding the cyclists showers roadside spectators with coffee samples, logo-emblazoned balloons, pens and other free junk-advertising gifts and is easily as much fun as watching the cyclists themselves speed through – in 10 seconds flat.

France's greatest moment in football history came at the 1998 World Cup, which the country hosted and won. But the game has produced no stars since, losing to Italy in the final of the 2006 World Cup. There was also no luck for *les Bleus* in South Africa in 2010, which saw the French team eliminated in the first round – but not before striker Nicolas Anelka was sent home to Paris for arguing with the referee, prompting

TOP FIVE: FROGS VS ROSBIFS

In the finest of traditions, rivalry between the English (*rosbifs*) and the French (*frogs*) sells like hotcakes. Our favourites:

- » *That Sweet Enemy: the French and the British from the Sun King to the Present*, by Robert and Isabelle Tombs – cross-Channel rivalry in a historical context, light-hearted nonetheless.
- » *Help, the English Are Invading Us!* by José-Alain Fralon – they're everywhere. Slowly but surely the English are invading us...
- » *Cross Channel*, by Julian Barnes – a selection of classic short stories zooming in on everything both sides of the English Channel, from sex, art and love to literature, the Channel tunnel and the Eurostar.
- » *More France Please! We're British!* by Helen Frith-Powell – France from the perspective of Brits who choose to live there permanently.
- » *A Year in the Merde and Merde Actually*, by Stephen Clarke – dog poo everywhere, unnecessary bureaucracy, transport; Clarke spouts on about it all. You'll love it or hate it.

TOUR TRIVIA

- » French journalist and cyclist Henri Desgrange came up with the Tour de France in 1903 as a means of promoting his sports newspaper *L'Auto* (now called *L'Équipe*).
- » With the exception of two world-war-induced intervals, the Tour de France has not missed a year since its inception.
- » The 1998 race was the 'tour of shame': fewer than 100 riders crossed the finish line after several teams were disqualified for doping.
- » *Le Blaireau* (the Badger), Brittany-born biking legend Bernard Hinault (b 1954), won the Tour de France five times before retiring in 1986.
- » American sports icon Lance Armstrong (b 1971) is the indisputable Tour de France king. He overcame testicular cancer, won seven consecutive times (1999 to 2005), retired, and returned to competitive cycling in 2009 (finishing third that year in the Tour).

the rest of the side to 'strike' in protest during a training session. Back home, deep shame at a team that had clearly not been good sports was what most French felt.

Losing out to London in its bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympics was a major loss of face for Paris. The French capital last hosted the gargantuan event in 1924.



Bon Appétit

Eating well is of prime importance to most French people, who spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about, discussing and enjoying food and wine – with gusto. Yet dining out doesn't have to be a ceremonious occasion or one riddled with pitfalls for the uninitiated. Approach food with half the enthusiasm *les français* do, and you will be welcomed, encouraged and exceedingly well fed.

Two natural factors determine what you eat on your French travels. Season and geography sees the hot south favour olive oil, garlic and tomatoes; the cooler, pastoral regions of northern France turn to cream and butter; and coastal areas are awash with mussels, oysters, saltwater fish and other seafood.

Borders are far from firmly drawn and while each region courts a handful of distinctly local dishes, you might well encounter influences of Gascon cuisine in the Atlantic region, an Alsatian-style *choucroute* (sauerkraut with sausage and other prepared meats) in seafaring Marseille or *andouillette* (Lyonnais pig-intestine sausage) in Paris.

Dining Diary

What the French call *petit déjeuner* is not every foreigner's cup of tea. The French just don't go all out at breakfast, kick-starting the day with a humble *tartine* (bit of baguette smeared with unsalted butter and jam) washed down with *un café* (espresso), long milky *café au lait* or – especially kids – hot chocolate. In hotels you get a cup but in French homes, the latter two are drunk from a cereal bowl – perfect bread-dunking terrain.

Urbanites might grab a coffee and croissant on the way to work, but otherwise croissants (eaten straight, never with butter or jam) are a weekend treat alongside brioches (sweet bread buns), *pains au chocolat* (chocolate-filled croissant), *pains aux raisins* (raisin-studded croissant swirl), *chaussons aux pommes* (apple-filled croissant) and other *viennoiserie* (baked goods), often still oven-warm, from the local bakery.

Next up is *déjeuner* (lunch), a meal no French would miss and one that is far more than, horror of horrors, a quick sandwich eaten at the desk. The traditional main meal of the day, it translates – at the very least – as a starter and main course with wine, followed by a short sharp *café*. (Never end a meal with a cappuccino, *café au lait* or cup of tea, which, incidentally, never comes with milk in France). Irrespective of time of day, a premeal aperitif is sacred to many.

Sunday lunch is a long, languid affair in many French families, when several hours are devoted to enjoying the many courses it entails. Indeed, a fully fledged, traditional French meal – lunch or *dîner* – is an awesome event, often comprising six distinct *plats* (courses), each accompanied by a wine to complement the cuisine. As in many top-end restaurants, this might mean an *amuse-bouche* (hors d'oeuvre) between the starter and main course; a sweet equivalent before dessert, plus *petit fours* with coffee.

LA CUISINE FRANÇAISE

The Food of France by Waverley Root, first published in 1958, remains the seminal work in English on *la cuisine française*, with a focus on historical development, by a long-time Paris-based American foreign correspondent.

Dining Lexicon

- » **Auberge** Country inn serving traditional country fare, often attached to a rural B&B or small hotel
- » **Ferme auberge** Working farm that cooks up meals built squarely from local farm products; usually served *table d'hôte* (literally 'host's table'), meaning in set courses with little or no choice
- » **Bistro** (also spelled *bistrot*) Anything from a pub or bar with snacks and light meals to a small, fully fledged restaurant
- » **Brasserie** Very much like a *café* except it serves full meals, drinks and coffee from morning until 11pm or even later. Typical fare includes *choucroute* (sauerkraut) and *moules frites* (mussels and fries).
- » **Restaurant** Born in Paris in 1765 when Monsieur A Boulanger opened a small business on rue Bailleuil in the 1er *arrondissement* selling soups, broths and other restaurants ('restoratives'); most today serve lunch and dinner five or six days; for standard opening hours see p958
- » **Buffet** (or *buvette*) Kiosk, usually at train stations and airports, selling drinks, filled baguettes and snacks
- » **Café** Serves basic food as well as drinks, most commonly a chunk of baguette filled with Camembert or *pâté* and *cornichons* (miniature gherkins), a *croque monsieur* (grilled ham and toasted cheese sandwich) or a *croque madame* (a toasted cheese sandwich topped with a fried egg)
- » **Crêperie** (also *galetteries*) Casual address specialising in sweet *crêpes* and savoury *galettes* (buckwheat *crêpes*)
- » **Salon de Thé** Trendy tearoom often serving light lunches (quiche, salads, cakes, tarts, pies and pastries) as well as black and herbal teas

Bread

The nuts-and-bolts of French cuisine is *pain* (bread), typically eaten at every meal. Order in a restaurant and within minutes a basket should be on your table. Except in a handful of top-end gastronomic restaurants, butter (unsalted in the main) is never an accompaniment.

Bread comes in infinite shapes, sizes and variety. Plain old *pain* is a 400g, traditional-shaped loaf, soft inside and crusty out. The iconic classic is *une baguette*, a long thin crusty loaf weighing 250g. Anything fatter and it becomes *une flûte*, thinner *une ficelle*. When buying bread in a *boulangerie* (bakery), ask for a *demi-baguette* or a *demi-pain* if you only need a half-baguette or -loaf. (Bear in mind, while French baguettes are impossibly good, they turn unpleasantly dry within four hours, rock-hard within 12.)

Many bakeries carry heavier breads made with all sorts of grains and cereals, nuts, raisins, herbs, cheese and so on. These generally keep much longer than baguettes and standard white-flour breads.

THE MENU

In any anglophone country the menu is the menu (called the *carte* in French) – that is, the list of what's cooking in the order you'd eat it: *entrée* (starter), *plat* (main course), *fromage* (cheese) then dessert (pudding).

In France, however, *le menu* is a two- or three-course meal at a fixed price. It's by far the best-value dining there is and most bistros and restaurants chalk one on the board. Lunch *menus* occasionally include a glass of wine and/or coffee, and dinner *menus* in top-end gastronomic restaurants sometimes pair each course with a perfectly matched glass of wine.

Not to be confused with a *menu* is *une formule*, a cheaper lunchtime option comprising a main – often the *plat du jour* (dish of the day) plus starter or dessert.

Strict vegetarians note: most French cheeses are made with rennet, an enzyme derived from the stomach of a calf or young goat, and some red wines (especially Bordeaux) are clarified with the albumin of egg whites.

Cheese

France is cheese land and the local *fromagerie* (cheese shop) is the pongiest shop in town. With more than 500 varieties – which can be raw, pasteurised or *petit-lait* ('little-milk', the whey left over after the fats and solids have been curdled with rennet) – buying cheese can be an overwhelming affair. Any self-respecting *fromager* (cheese merchant) will let you taste before you buy – just ask. Say when you intend eating it to ensure the cheese is *fait* (ripe) to a perfect degree.

Contrary to opinion, the French don't eat cheese with every meal – just every fine meal, which rolls out the cheeseboard before dessert (much to the surprise of those used to eating it after dessert back home). It is always served with baguette, never crackers, and no butter.

Wine and cheese can be a match made in heaven. In general, strong pungent cheeses require a young, full-bodied red or a sweet wine, while soft cheeses with a refined flavour call for more quality and age. Classic pairings include Alsatian Gewürztraminer and Munster; Côtes du Rhône with Roquefort; Côte d'Or (Burgundy) and Brie or Camembert; and mature Bordeaux with emmental or Cantal. Even Champagne can get in on the act; drink it with mushroom-like Chaource.

Charcuterie

Charcuterie is the backbone of any self-respecting picnic made in almost every French region. Alsace, Lyon and the Auvergne in the Massif Cen-

THE PERFECT CHEESEBOARD

Treat your taste buds to the perfect balance of cheese by taking at least one of each type from the cheeseboard:

» **Goat's cheese** (*fromage de chèvre*) Made from goat's milk, this cheese is creamy, sweet and faintly salty when fresh, but hardens and gets saltier as it matures. Among the best are Ste-Maure de Touraine, a mild creamy cheese from the Loire Valley; the classic but saltier Crottin de Chavignol from Burgundy; Cabécou de Rocamadour from Midi-Pyrénées, often served warm with salad or marinated in oil and rosemary; and Lyon's St-Marcellin, a soft white cheese that should be served nothing other than impossibly runny.

» **Blue cheese** (*fromage à pâte persillée*) 'Marbled' or with veins that resemble *persil* (parsley). Don't miss king of French cheese Roquefort, a ewe's-milk veined cheese from Languedoc; the very mild cow's-milk cheese Fourme d'Ambert from the Rhône Valley; or Bleu du Haut Jura (also called Bleu de Gex), a mild blue-veined mountain cheese from the Jura.

» **Soft cheese** (*fromage à pâte molle*) Moulded or rind-washed, the classic soft cheese that everyone knows is Camembert from Normandy and the refined Brie de Meaux; both are made from unpasteurised cow's milk. Munster from Alsace and the strong and seriously smelly Époisses de Bourgogne are fine-textured, rind-washed cheeses.

» **Semihard cheese** (*fromage à pâte demi-dure*) Among the finest uncooked, pressed cheese is Tomme de Savoie, made from either pasteurised or unpasteurised cow's milk not far from the Alps; cantal, a cow's-milk cheese from Auvergne that bears a faint resemblance to English cheddar; St-Nectaire, a strong-smelling pressed cheese that has a complex taste; and Ossau-Iraty, a ewe's-milk cheese made in the Basque Country.

» **Hard cheese** (*fromage à pâte dure*) Absolute must-taste cooked and pressed cheeses are Beaufort, a grainy cow's-milk cheese with a slightly fruity taste from Rhône-Alpes; Comté, a cheese made with raw cow's milk in Franche-Comté; emmental, a cow's-milk cheese made all over France; and Mimolette, an Edam-like bright-orange cheese from Lille that can be aged for as long as 36 months.

FOOD CALENDAR

tral produce the best salami and sausages; and the Dordogne and northern France the best pâtés and terrines.

Traditionally charcuterie is made only from pork, though other meats (beef, veal, chicken or goose) are used in making sausages, salamis, blood puddings and other cured and salted meats. Pâtés, terrines and rillettes (coarsely shredded potted meat) are also considered types of charcuterie. The difference between a pâté and a terrine is academic: a pâté is removed from its container and sliced before it is served, while a terrine is sliced from the container itself. Rillettes, on the other hand, is potted meat or even fish that has not been ground or chopped but shredded with two forks, seasoned, and mixed with fat. It is spread cold over bread or toast.

Popular types of charcuterie include *andouillette* (soft raw sausage made from the pig's small intestines that is grilled and eaten with onions and potatoes – Lyon is famed for them); *boudin noir* (blood sausage or pudding made with pig's blood, onions and spices); *jambon* (ham, smoked or salt-cured); *saucisse* (small fresh sausage, boiled or grilled before eating); *saucisson* (large salami eaten cold); and *saucisson sec* (air-dried salami).

Regional Specialities

Diverse as it is, French cuisine is typified by certain regions, notably Normandy, Burgundy, the Dordogne, Lyon and, to a lesser extent, the Loire Valley, Alsace and Provence. Others – Brittany, Languedoc, the Basque Country and Corsica – have made incalculable contributions to what can generically be called French food.

NORMANDY

Cream, apples and cider are the essentials of Norman cuisine, which sees mussels simmered in cream and a splash of cider to make *moules à la crème normande* and tripe thrown in the slow pot with cider and vegetables to make, several hours later, *tripes à la mode de Caen*. Creamy Camembert cheese made from local cow's milk is the only *fromage* to have as cheese course or on a picnic, and on the coast it is *coquilles St-Jacques* (sublime pan-fried scallop) and *huîtres* (oysters) that rule the seafood roost. Apples are the essence of the region's main tipples: tangy cider (p192) and the potent apple-brandy *calvados*, exquisite straight or splashed on apple sorbet.

BURGUNDY

A region particularly popular for cooking courses (p391), vine-wealthy Burgundy honours a culinary trinity of beef, red wine and Dijon mustard. Savour an authentic *bœuf bourguignon* (beef marinated and cooked in young red wine with mushrooms, onions, carrots and bacon) or beef with sauce Morvandelle (shallot, mustard and white wine sauce), followed by the pick of Burgundy AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) cheeses (p408).

January

Black truffles abound in Provence and the Dordogne. Lemons are picked on the French Riviera and skiers in the French Alps dip into cheese fondue.

February

On the Mediterranean, sea urchins are caught and eaten west of Marseille. Inland, the Dordogne exalts the goose's contribution to French cooking with festive foie gras.

March

Asparagus appears at markets in southern France and it's almost the end of black truffles. This is the last chance in Provence to buy the year's olive oil and in the Alps, to dip into fondue.

April

Spring means fresh goat's cheese, artichokes, Pâques (Easter), *œufs au chocolat* (chocolate eggs) filled with candy, fish and chickens to hunt with the kids, and a traditional lamb for lunch.

May

During the traditional transhumance, shepherds move their cows and flocks of sheep up to higher pastures to graze. Heading south, the first strawberries turn market stalls red.

June

Fresh garlic is harvested and piled high in woven garlands alongside melons and cherries at Provençal markets. In Brittany shallots are hand-harvested.

Foodie Towns

- » **Le Puy-en-Velay** for lentils
- » **Dijon** for mustard
- » **Privas** for chestnuts
- » **Cancale** for oysters
- » **Espelette** for red chillies
- » **Colmar** for chocolate stork eggs
- » **Lyon** for piggy-part cuisine

Or eat a snail (p410), traditionally served by the dozen and oven-baked in their shells with butter, garlic and parsley to a gooey deliciousness – mop the juices up with bread.

THE DORDOGNE

Known as Périgord by the French, this southwest region is fabulously famous for its black truffles (p568) and poultry, especially ducks and geese, whose fattened livers are turned into *pâté de foie gras* (duck- or goose-liver pâté), which, somewhat predictably, comes straight or flavoured with Cognac and truffles. *Confit de canard* and *confit d'oie* are duck or goose joints cooked very slowly in their own fat. The preserved fowl is then left to stand for some months before being eaten. The escargot (snail) is the Dordogne's other tasty treat – savour one stuffed with foie gras.

LYON

All too often it is dubbed France's gastronomic capital. And while it hardly competes with France's real capital when it comes to sheer variety of international cuisine, it certainly holds its own when it comes to titillating taste buds with the unusual and inventive. Take the age-old repertoire of feisty, often pork-driven dishes served in the city's legendary *bouchons* (small bistros): breaded fried tripe, big fat *andouillettes* (put bluntly, sausage made from the intestine of a pig – or perhaps you prefer his trotters?), silk-weaver's brains – there is no way you can ever say Lyonnais cuisine is run-of-the-mill.

A perfect picnic companion is wafer-thin slices of *saucisson de Lyon* (dried pork sausage) and *cornichons* (miniature gherkins). A lighter, less meaty speciality is *quenelle de brochet*, a poached dumpling made of freshwater fish (usually pike) and served with sauce Nantua (a cream and freshwater-crayfish sauce).

For a complete rundown of what's on the Lyonnais menu see p448.

THE LOIRE VALLEY

Rabelais' phrase '*le jardin de France*' (the garden of France) has been exploited nationwide since he coined it in the 16th century to describe his native Touraine. Yet it is the Loire that remains most true to his image of a green and succulent, well-watered landscape laden with lush fruit, flowers, nuts and vegetables: *pruneaux de Tours* (prunes dried from luscious damson plums) are justifiably famous, and mushrooms polka-dot the forests. In the Loire's unique troglodyte caves *champignons de Paris* (button mushrooms) are cultivated (see p384).

Appropriately, it was the cooking refined in the kitchens of the region's châteaux in the 16th century that became what most today consider to be 'quintessentially French': coq au vin (chicken in red wine), *cuisses de grenouilles* (frogs legs) and *tarte tatin* (upside-down apple tart) all originate from this riverside region. Poultry and game dishes were the pride and joy of the medieval kitchen, and once or twice a year

A CAKE FOR KINGS

One tradition very much alive is *Jour des Rois* (Day of the Kings), or Epiphany, on 6 January when the Three Wise Men paid homage to the infant Jesus. A *galette des rois* (literally 'kings' cake'; a puff-pastry tart with frangipane cream) is placed in the centre of the table and sliced while the youngest person ducks under the table, calling out who gets each slice. The excitement lies in who gets *la fève* (literally 'bean', which translates these days as a miniature porcelain figurine) hidden inside the tart; whoever does is crowned king with a gold paper crown that's sold with the galette.

a fattened pig was slaughtered and meat from its neck minced up and fried to make rillettes, a cold paste ranked as the region's signature dish.

Fresh fish from the River Loire and Atlantic Ocean has been served with *beurre blanc* (white sauce) since the 19th century and goat's cheeses from the valley – Crottins de Chavignol, Ste-Maure de Touraine, Pouligny St-Pierre and black ash-dusted Selles-sur-Cher are among France's best.

ALSACE

With its close cultural ties to Germany, Alsace enjoys a cuisine quite distinct from the rest of France (see also p313). Meaty, Teutonic and served in *winstubs* (traditional Alsatian taverns), no dish is more classic than *choucroute alsacienne* (also called *choucroute garnie*) – sauerkraut flavoured with juniper berries and served hot with sausages, bacon, pork and/or ham knuckle. *Wüdele braisé au pinot noir* (ham knuckles braised in wine) also come with sauerkraut. Crack open a bottle of chilled riesling or Alsatian pinot noir to accompany either and round off the filling feast with a *tarte alsacienne*, a scrumptious custard tart made with local fruit like mirabelles (sweet yellow plums) or *quetsches* (a variety of purple plum). Beer is big in Alsace but a big no-no when it comes to sauerkraut.

The quintessential lighter meal is Flammekueche or *tarte flambée*. The Alsatian interpretation of a pizza, it sees onions, *lardons* (bacon bits) and crème fraîche (sour cream) loaded on top of a wafer-thin dough base and oven-baked until crisp – great finger-licking, lip-smacking stuff.

Picnic idea: bread and holy Munster cheese (see p329).

PROVENCE & THE RIVIERA

Cuisine in this sun-baked land is laden with tomatoes, melons, cherries, peaches, olives, Mediterranean fish and Alpine cheese and has not changed for centuries. Farmers still gather at the weekly market to sell their fruit and vegetables, olives, woven garlic plaits and dried herbs displayed in stubby coarse sacks. *À la Provençal* still means anything with a generous dose of garlic-seasoned tomatoes; while a simple filet mignon sprinkled with olive oil and rosemary fresh from the garden makes the same magnificent Sunday lunch it did a generation ago.

Yet there are exciting culinary contrasts in this region, which see fishermen return with the catch of the day in seafaring Marseille; grazing bulls and paddy fields in the Camargue; lambs in the Alpilles; black truffles in the Vaucluse; cheese made from cow's milk in Alpine pastures and an Italianate accent to cooking in seaside Nice.

Bouillabaisse is Provence's most famous contribution to French cuisine. The chowder must contain at least three kinds of fresh saltwater fish, cooked for about 10 minutes in a broth containing onions,

July

Tomatoes every shade of red, apricots, fresh figs, peaches, melons and cherries jam-pack markets.

August

July's fruit-and-veg bonanza continues and harvested lavender appears. The Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts revel in their rich year-round bounty of seafood and shellfish – mussels and oysters are everywhere.

September

The Camargue's nutty red rice is harvested. The boletus-mushroom season begins around wine-rich Bordeaux and elsewhere. In higher areas, flocks are shepherded back down the mountain for winter.

October

Normandy apples fall from trees to make France's finest cider. Espelette chilli peppers are hung out to dry and the chestnut harvest starts in the Ardèche, Cévennes and Corsica.

November

Nets are strung beneath silvery groves in Provence and Corsica to catch black and green olives, later pressed for their oil. In damp woods everywhere mushrooming is now in earnest.

December

Pungent markets in the Dordogne and Provence sell black truffles. In the Alps the first skiers dip into cheese fondue. Christmas means Champagne and oysters, chestnut-stuffed turkey and yule logs.

tomatoes, saffron and various herbs, and eaten as a main course with toasted bread and *rouille*, a spicy red mayonnaise of olive oil, garlic and chilli peppers.

BRITTANY

Brittany is a paradise for seafood-lovers (think lobster, scallops, sea bass, turbot, mussels etc), and kids, thanks to the humble crêpe and galette, an ancient culinary tradition that has long ruled Breton cuisine. Pair a sweet wheat-flour pancake or savoury buckwheat galette with *une bolée* (a stubby terracotta goblet) of apple-rich Breton cider and taste buds enter gourmet heaven. Then learn to cook your authentic own (p276).

Cheese is not big in Brittany, but *la beurre de Bretagne* (Breton butter) is. Traditionally sea-salted and exceedingly creamy, a knob of it naturally goes into crêpes, galettes and the most outrageously butteriest cake you're likely to ever taste in your life – *kouig amann* (Breton butter cake). Imagine dough loaded with butter and sugar and baked into a salty-sweet caramelised bliss. Bretons, unlike the rest of the French, even butter their bread. Butter handmade by Jean-Yves Bourdier – you can buy it at his shop in St-Malo (p239) – ends up on tables of top restaurants around the world.

Seaweed and 80% of French shallots are other Breton culinary curiosities.

LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

No dish better evokes Languedoc than *cassoulet*, an earthy cockle-warming stew of white beans and meat that fires passionate debate (and yes, people do eat it in summer too). Everyone knows best which type of bean and meat hunk should be thrown in the *cassole*, the traditional earthenware dish it is cooked and brought to the table in. The version made in Toulouse adds *saucisse de Toulouse*, a fat, mild-tasting pork sausage.

Otherwise this region's overtly cuisine *campagnarde* (country cooking) sees fishermen tend lagoon oyster beds on the coast, olives pressed in gentle hills inland, blue-veined 'king of cheeses' ripening in caves in Roquefort (p743), fattened geese and gaggles of ducks around Toulouse, sheep in salty marsh meadows around Montpellier, and mushrooms in its forests.

A Spanish accent gives cuisine in neighbouring Roussillon a fiery twist of Catalan exuberance.

BASQUE COUNTRY

Among the essential ingredients of Basque cooking are the deep-red Espelette chillies that add an extra bite to many of the region's dishes, including the dusting on the signature *jambon de Bayonne*, the locally prepared Bayonne ham. Eating out in this Catalan neck of the woods is a real charm thanks to its many casual *pintxo* bars serving garlic prawns, spicy chorizo sausages and other local dishes *tapas*-style (see p640).

Basques love cakes, especially *gâteau basque* (layer cake filled with cream or cherry jam). Then there's Bayonne chocolate (p637).

CORSICA

The hills and mountains of the island of Corsica have always been ideal for raising stock, and the dense Corsican underbrush called the *maquis* is made up of shrubs mixed with wild herbs. These raw materials come together to create aromatic trademark Corsican dishes like *stufatu* (fragrant mutton stew), *premonata* (beef braised with juniper berries) and *lonzo* (Corsican sausage cooked with white beans, white wine and herbs). For more on Corsican cuisine, see p669.



French Wine

French wines might not be the world's most venerated, but making them is an ancient art and tradition that bears its own unique trademark. *Dégustation* (tasting), moreover, is an essential part of any French travel experience: quaff Champagne with friends in a Lille wine bar designed in 1892 by Gustave Eiffel's architectural firm; hike between Alsatian vines with an organic wine producer; trail walking itineraries in St-Émilion's Unesco World Heritage vineyards; taste with one of the world's top sommeliers to determine your star sign of wine... experiences such as these are the essence of French wine culture.

There are dozens of wine-producing regions throughout France, but the seven principal ones are Burgundy, Bordeaux, the Rhône and Loire valleys, Champagne, Languedoc, Provence and Alsace. Wines are generally named after the location of the vineyard rather than the grape varietal. Organic and biodynamic wines are becoming increasingly popular.

The best French wines are Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC), meaning they meet stringent regulations governing where, how and under what conditions they are grown, fermented and bottled. Some regions, such as Alsace, only have a single AOC; others, like Burgundy, have scores. About a third of all French wine carries that AOC hallmark of guarantee.

Some viticulturists have honed their skills and techniques to such a degree that their wine is known as a *grand cru* (literally 'great growth'). If this wine has been produced in a year of optimum climatic conditions, it becomes a *millésime* (vintage) wine. *Grands crus* are aged in small oak barrels then bottles, sometimes for 20 years or more, to create those memorable bottles with price tags to match that wine experts enthuse about with such passion.

Burgundy

During the reign of Charlemagne, monks began making the wine that gave Burgundy (Bourgogne in French) its sterling reputation for viticulture. Burgundy's *vignerons* (winegrowers) only have small vineyards, rarely more than 10 hectares, and they produce small quantities of very good wine. Burgundy reds are made with pinot noir grapes and the best vintages demand 10 to 20 years to age; whites are made with chardonnay. See p419 for tasting addresses and so on.

Burgundy's most famed winegrowing areas are Côte d'Or, Chablis, Châtillon and Mâcon. Lesser known Ircancy (p416) is a charming, local wine-tasting favourite.

Bordeaux

Britons have had a taste for Bordeaux' full-bodied wines, known as clarets in the UK, since the mid-12th century when King Henry II, who controlled the region through marriage, tried to gain the favour of the

Top Wine Schools

- » **Langlois-Château** Saumur, Loire Valley
- » **École des Vins de Bourgogne & Sensation Vin** Beaune, Burgundy
- » **École du Vin** Bordeaux
- » **Château Maro-jallia** The Médoc
- » **École du Vin de St-Émilion** St-Émilion
- » **Centre de Dégustation Jacques Vivet** Paris

The French day might no longer start with a shot of red wine followed by a black coffee to *tuer le ver* (kill the worm), but lunch without *une verre du vin* is unimaginable.

Tasting Terms

- » **bar à vins** wine bar
- » **cave** wine cellar
- » **caveau** a small cellar
- » **dégustation** tasting
- » **gratuit** free
- » **maison des vins** literally 'House of Wines'; a place to taste and buy regional wines
- » **vente sales**

locals by granting them tax-free trade status with England. Thus began a roaring business in wine exporting.

Bordeaux has the perfect climate for producing wine; as a result its 1100 sq km of vineyards produce more fine wine than any other region in the world. Bordeaux reds are often described as well balanced, a quality achieved by blending several grape varieties. The grapes predominantly used are merlot, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc.

Bordeaux' foremost winegrowing areas are the Médoc, Pomerol, St-Émilion and Graves. The nectarlike sweet whites of the Sauternes area are the world's finest dessert wines.

Côtes du Rhône

Dramatically different soil, climate, topography and grapes in the Rhône Valley region means very different wines in this vast appellation – France's second largest – covering 771 sq km. The most renowned is Châteauneuf du Pape, a full-bodied wine bequeathed to Provence by the Avignon popes who planted the distinctive stone-covered vineyards, 10km south of Orange.

Châteauneuf du Pape reds are strong (minimum alcohol content 12.5%) and well structured. Winegrowers, obliged to pick their grapes by hand, say it is the *galets* (large smooth, yellowish stones) covering their vineyards that distinguish their wines from others. Both whites and reds can be drunk young (two to three years) or old (plus seven years).

Another popular Rhône Valley *grand cru* is red and rosé Gigondas. The medieval golden-stone village with its ruined castle, Provençal campanile and stunning vistas is a delight to meander and its reds are among Provence's most sought after. In nearby Beaumes de Venise it is the sweet dessert wine, Muscat de Beaumes de Venise, that delights, enjoyed in equal measure as an aperitif or poured inside half a Cavaillon melon as dessert.

The Loire

The Loire's 700 sq km of vineyards rank it as France's third-largest area for the production of quality wines. Although sunny, the climate is humid, meaning not all grape varieties thrive. Still, the Loire produces the greatest variety of wines of any region in the country. The most common grapes are the muscadet, cabernet franc and chenin blanc varieties. Wines tend to be light and delicate. Be sure to sample wines from Pouilly-Fumé, Vouvray, Sancerre, Bourgueil, Chinon and Saumur.

Champagne

Champagne, northeast of Paris, has been the centre France's best-known wine since the 17th century, when innovative monk Dom Pierre Pérignon perfected a technique for making sparkling wine.

Champagne is made from the red pinot noir, the black pinot meunier or the white chardonnay grape. Each vine is vigorously pruned and trained to produce a small quantity of high-quality grapes. Indeed, to

TASTING & BUYING WINE

Wine can be bought direct from the *producteur* (wine producer) or *vigneron* (wine-grower), most of whom offer a *dégustation* (tasting), allowing you to sample two or three vintages with no obligation to buy. For cheap plonk (*vin de table*) costing €2 or so per litre, fill up your own container at the local wine cooperative; every wine-producing village has one. Lists of estates, *caves* (wine cellars) and cooperatives are available from tourist offices and *maisons des vins* (wine houses) in main towns in wine-producing areas.

MAKING FIZZ

Making Champagne is a complex procedure. There are two fermentation processes, the first in casks and the second after the wine has been bottled and had sugar and yeast added. Bottles are then aged in cellars for two to five years, depending on the *cuvée* (vintage).

During the two months in early spring that the bottles are aged in cellars kept at 12°C, the wine turns effervescent. The sediment that forms in the bottle is removed by *remuage*, a painstakingly slow process in which each bottle – stored horizontally – is rotated slightly every day for weeks until the sludge works its way to the cork. Next comes *dégorgement*: the neck of the bottle is frozen, creating a blob of solidified Champagne and sediment, then removed.

maintain exclusivity (and price), the designated areas where grapes used for Champagne can be grown and the amount of wine produced each year are limited. In 2008 the borders that confine the Champagne AOC label were extended to include another 40 villages, increasing the value of their vineyards and its produce by tens of millions of euros (and making partygoers around the world forever grateful). Yet the bulk of Champagne is consumed in France.

If the final product is labelled *brut*, it is extra dry, with only 1.5% sugar content. *Extra-sec* means very dry (but not as dry as *brut*), *sec* is dry and *demi-sec* slightly sweet. The sweetest Champagne is labelled *doux*. Whatever the label, it is sacrilege to drink it out of anything other than a traditional Champagne *flûte*, narrow at the bottom to help the bubbles develop, wider in the middle to promote the diffusion of aromas, and narrower at the top again to concentrate those precious aromas.

Most of the famous Champagne *maisons* (houses) can be visited. See p286 for details.

Languedoc

Winemaking here is enjoying a renaissance. Following violent protests over Italian imports in the mid-1970s, farmers were subsidised to cut down their vines and replant with better quality AOC grapes, hence Languedoc's splendid wine and gargantuan production today: up to 40% of France's wine is produced in this vast sea of vines (just over a third of France's total).

Of increasing interest are the thoroughly modern table wines made under the Vin de Pays d'Oc (www.vindepaysdoc.com) label. Free of AOC restriction, these wines fly in the face of viticulture tradition as they experiment with new grape blends. The result: creative, affordable wines with funky names, designer etiquettes (and pink neocorks in the case of rosés) to reflect a contemporary lifestyle. Try a Mas de Daumas Gassac (www.daumas-gassac.com) or one of the 'chicken wines' of pioneering viticulturist Sacha Lichine (www.sachalichine.com).

Languedoc's best-known AOC wines are Minervois (drink its white with local sardines!) and Corbières, both known for well-structured reds. An island of six villages in the Minervois produces Minervois La Livinière, a red *vin de garde* (wine suitable for ageing) par excellence. Fitou, the granddad of Languedoc appellations (1948), is another red, easy to keep for four or five years.

Provence

There is no more quintessential image of daily life in this hot part of southern France than lounging beneath a vine-laced pergola, glass of chilled pink rosé in hand.

Top Self-Drive Wine Itineraries

- » **Marne & Côte des Bar Champagne routes** Champagne
- » **Route des Vins d'Alsace** Alsace
- » **Route Touristique des Vignobles** Loire Valley

Meals in France are preceded by an *apéritif* such as a *kir* (white wine sweetened with black-currant syrup), *kir royale* (Champagne with black-currant syrup), *pineau* (cognac and grape juice) or a glass of sweet white Coteaux du Layon from the Loire Valley. In southern France aniseed-flavoured pastis, clear in the bottle, cloudy when mixed with water, is the aperitif to drink al fresco; in the southwest, go local with a Floc de Gascogne, a liqueur wine made from Armagnac and red or white grape juice.

After-dinner drinks accompany coffee. France's most famous brandies are Cognac and Armagnac, both made from grapes in the regions of those names. *Eaux de vie*, literally 'waters of life', can be made with grape skins and the pulp left over after being pressed for wine (Marc de Champagne, Marc de Bourgogne), apples (Calvados) and pears (Poire William), as well as such fruits as plums (*eau de vie de prune*) and even raspberries (*eau de vie de framboise*). In the Loire Valley a shot of orange (aka a glass of local Cointreau liqueur) ends the meal.

When in Normandy, do as the festive Normans do: refresh the palate between courses with a *trou normand* (literally 'Norman hole') – traditionally a shot of *calva* (Calvados) or a contemporary scoop of apple sorbet doused in the local apple brandy.

Dating from 1977, Côtes de Provence is the region's largest appellation and France's sixth largest, producing 75% of Provençal wine. Its vineyards carpet 20 hectares between Nice and Aix-en-Provence, and its *terroir* (land) is astonishingly varied; few other appellations support such a variety of grape varieties – at least a dozen. Drunk young and served at 8°C to 10°C, it is among the world's oldest wines. Vines were planted by the Greeks in Massilia (Marseille) around 600 BC.

Smaller appellations include Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence and Palette around Aix-en-Provence; Côtes du Ventoux (light and fruity reds drunk young); Côtes du Luberon (young reds made trendy by rich foreigners and media stars buying up its vineyards); and Coteaux Varois of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt fame (in 2008 the celeb pair rented Château de Miraval, a gold-stone château on a prestigious organic wine-producing estate in Correns, where Pink Floyd recorded part of *The Wall* in 1979).

The real star of the Provence show though is Bandol, with its own AOC since 1941. Its deep-flavoured reds are produced from dark-berried *mourvèdre* grapes grown on the coast near Toulon and ripened by oodles of sun, hence its rarity. In Roman times these wines were famous across Gaul, and their ability to mature at sea meant they travelled far beyond their home shores in the 16th and 17th centuries.

A little west along the same coast is Cassis, known for its crisp whites, the dream companion for the bijou port's bounty of shellfish and seafood.

Alsace

Alsace produces almost exclusively white wines – mostly varieties produced nowhere else in France – that are known for their clean, fresh taste and compatibility with the often heavy local cuisine. Unusually, some of the fruity Alsatian whites also go well with red meat. The vineyards closest to Strasbourg produce light red wines from pinot noir that are similar to rosé and are best served chilled.

Alsace's four most important varietal wines are riesling (known for its subtlety), Gewürztraminer (pungent and highly regarded), pinot gris (robust and high in alcohol) and muscat d'Alsace (less sweet than muscats from southern France).

Don't bring wine if you're invited into a French home, unless it's a bottle of chilled Champagne. The wine your host has chosen will be an expression of their tastes, but Champagne is welcomed by all.



The Arts

Literature

Courtly Love to Symbolism

Troubadours' lyric poems of courtly love dominated medieval French literature, while the *roman* (literally 'romance', now meaning 'novel') drew on old Celtic tales. With the *Roman de la Rose*, a 22,000-line poem by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, allegorical figures like Pleasure, Shame and Fear appeared.

French Renaissance literature was great: La Pléiade was a group of lyrical poets active in the 1550s and 1560s. The exuberant narrative of Loire Valley-born François Rabelais (1494–1553) blends coarse humour with encyclopaedic erudition in a vast panorama of subjects that includes every existent kind of person, occupation and jargon in 16th-century France. Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) covered cannibals, war horses, drunkenness and the resemblance of children to their fathers and other themes.

The *grand siècle* (golden age) ushered in classical lofty odes to tragedy. François de Malherbe (1555–1628) brought a new rigour to rhythm in poetry; and Marie de La Fayette (1634–93) penned the first French novel, *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678).

The philosophical Voltaire (1694–1778) dominated the 18th century. A century on, Besançon gave birth to French romantic Victor Hugo. The breadth of interest and technical innovations exhibited in his poems and novels – *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* among them – was phenomenal: after his death, his coffin was laid beneath the Arc de Triomphe for an all-night vigil.

In 1857 literary landmarks *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert (1821–80), and Charles Baudelaire's (1821–67) poems *Les Fleurs du Mal* (The Flowers of Evil), were published. Émile Zola (1840–1902) saw novel-writing as a science in his powerful series, *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

Evoking mental states was the dream of symbolists Paul Verlaine (1844–96) and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98). Verlaine shared a tempestuous homosexual relationship with poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854–91): enter French literature's first modern poems.

Modern Literature

The world's longest novel – a seven-volume 9,609,000-character giant by Marcel Proust (1871–1922) – dominated the early 20th century. *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past) explores in evocative detail the true meaning of past experience recovered from the unconscious by 'involuntary memory'.

Surrealism proved a vital force until WWII. André Breton (1896–1966) captured the spirit of surrealism – a fascination with dreams, divination and all manifestations of 'the marvellous' – in his autobiographical narratives. In Paris the bohemian Colette (1873–1954) captivated and

Literary Sights

- » Colette's Paris: St-Germain cafés
- » Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir graves, Cimetière du Montparnasse, Paris
- » Oscar Wilde grave, Cimetière du Père Lachaise, Paris
- » Musée Colette, Burgundy
- » Musée Jules Verne, Nantes

shocked with her titillating novels detailing the amorous exploits of heroines such as schoolgirl Claudine.

After WWII, existentialism developed around the lively debates of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) and Albert Camus (1913–60) in Paris' Left Bank cafés.

The *nouveau roman* of the 1950s saw experimental young writers seek new ways of organising narratives, with Nathalie Sarraute slashing identifiable characters and plot in *Les Fruits d'Or* (The Golden Fruits). *Histoire d'O* (Story of O), an erotic sadomasochistic novel written by Dominique Aury under a pseudonym in 1954, sold more copies outside France than any other contemporary French novel. In the 1960s, novelist Philippe Sollers raised eyebrows.

Contemporary Literature

Contemporary authors include Françoise Sagan, Pascal Quignard, Anna Gavalda, Emmanuel Carrère and Stéphane Bourguignon. No French writer better delves into the mind, mood and politics of the country's ethnic population than Faïza Guène (b 1985), sensation of the French literary scene. Born and bred on a ghetto housing estate outside Paris, she stunned critics with her debut novel, *Kiffe Kiffe Demain* (2004), sold in 27 countries and published in English as *Just Like Tomorrow* (2006). Like the parents of most of her friends and neighbours, Faïza Guène's father moved from a village in western Algeria to northern France in 1952, aged 17, to work in the mines. Only in the 1980s could he return to Algeria. There he met his wife, whom he brought back to France – to Les Courtilières housing estate in Seine-St-Denis, where 6000-odd immigrants live like sardines in five-storey high-rise blocks stretching for 1.5km. Such is the setting for Guène's first book and her second semi-autobiographical novel, *Du Rêve pour les Oeufs* (2006), published in English as *Dreams from the Endz* (2008). Watch for the English translation of her equally successful third novel, *Les Gens du Balto* (www.faiza-guene-lesgensdubalto.fr, in French).

A LITERARY FELLOW: THE FRENCH JAMES BOND

Secret agent OSS 117, aka France's James Bond, was a literary fellow – created four years before Ian Fleming's 007 by French novelist Jean Bruce (1921–63). Making his debut in 1949 with *Tu Parles d'une Ingénue* (You Speak of an Ingénue), Hubert Bonisseur de La Bath, colonel in the Office of Strategic Service (OSS), starred in 87 novels (selling 24 million copies) before his creator died in a car accident in 1963.

But the silky-smooth, dark-haired action man with a penchant for beautiful women, fancy gadgets and dicing with death was not dead. Three years after Bruce's death, his widow Josette took over, penning another incredible 143 adventures between 1966 and 1985. Josette died in 1996.

Next up, the couple's children, François and Martine Bruce, turned their hand to story writing, picking up the family tradition in 1987 with *OSS 117 est Mort* (OSS 117 is Dead) and churning out 24 more adventures in all. By the time *OSS 117 Prend le Large* (OSS 117 Takes Off) – the last to be published – hit the streets in 1992, the best-selling French series had been translated into 17 languages and sold 75 million copies.

As with 007, OSS 117 became a silver-screen idol too. French film director Jean Sacha brought the suave, womanising secret agent to life in his film adaptation of *OSS 117 n'est Pas Mort* (OSS 117 is Not Dead) in 1957. But it is the more recent, laugh-a-second parody starring France's best comic actor Jean Dujardin (b 1972) as the sexist, racist, macho, uncultured and cringingly outdated 1950s 'Bond...James Bond', or rather, 'Bonisseur de la Bath...Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath' in *OSS 117: Le Caire, Nid d'Espions* (OSS 117: Cairo, Nest of Spies; 2006) that gets the biggest curtain call.

READING LIST

One way of ensuring your beach reading is right up to the minute is to plump for the latest winner of the **Prix Goncourt**, France's most prestigious literary prize. Marcel Proust won it in 1919 for *À l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs* (Within a Budding Grove, 1924); Simon de Beauvoir in 1954 for *Les Mandarins* (The Mandarins, 1957); and, more recently, French-Afghan writer/film-maker Atiq Rahimi (b 1956) with *Syngué Sabour* (The Stone of Patience, 2008), and French-Senegalese novelist/playwright Marie NDiaye with *Trois Femmes Puissantes* (2009). Aged 21, the latter stunned the literary world with *Comédie Classique* (1988), a 200-page novel comprising just one single sentence. The 2010 winner was *La Carte et Le Territoire* by Michel Houellebecq (b 1958). Winning works are generally translated pretty swiftly into English.

Add to your reading list the proud laureate of France's other big literary award, the **Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française**, and your holiday reading list is sorted. The 2009 winner, *Les Onze*, by French novelist Pierre Michon (b 1945) hadn't been published in English at the time of research but given several of his other works are – *Small Lives* (2008) and *Master & Servants* (1997) included – it's not likely to be long before it is. *Nagasaki* by Eric Faye (b 1963) was the prize getter of 2010.

Music

Classical

French baroque music influenced European musical output in the 17th and 18th centuries. French musical luminaries – Charles Gounod (1818–93), César Franck (1822–90) and *Carmen* creator Georges Bizet (1838–75) among them – were a dime a dozen in the 19th century. Modern orchestration was founded by French romantic Hector Berlioz (1803–69). He demanded gargantuan forces: his ideal orchestra included 240 stringed instruments, 30 grand pianos and 30 harps.

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) revolutionised classical music with *Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Fawn), creating a light, almost Asian musical Impressionism. Impressionist comrade Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) peppered his work, including *Boléro*, with sensuousness and tonal colour. Contemporary composer Olivier Messiaen (1908–92) combined modern, almost mystical music with natural sounds such as birdsong. Unsurprisingly, his student Pierre Boulez (b 1925) works with computer-generated sound.

Jazz & French Chansons

Jazz hit 1920s Paris in the banana-clad form of Josephine Baker, an African-American cabaret dancer. Post-WWII ushered in a much-appreciated bunch of musicians – Sidney Bechet, Kenny Clarke, Bud Powell and Dexter Gordon among them. In 1934 a chance meeting between Parisian jazz guitarist Stéphane Grappelli and three-fingered Roma guitarist Django Reinhardt (whose birth centenary was celebrated nationwide in 2010) in a Montparnasse nightclub led to the formation of the Hot Club of France quintet. Claude Luter and his Dixieland band were hot in the 1950s.

The *chanson française*, a French folk-song tradition dating from the troubadours of the Middle Ages, was eclipsed by the music halls and burlesque of the early 20th century, but was revived in the 1930s by Piaf and Charles Trenet. In the 1950s, Paris' Left Bank cabarets nurtured *chansonniers* (cabaret singers) such as Léo Ferré, Georges Brassens, Claude Nougaro, Jacques Brel and the very charming, very sexy, very French Serge Gainsbourg. A biopic celebrating his life, *Serge Gainsbourg: Une Vie Héroïque* (Serge Gainsbourg: A Heroic Life) was released in 2009 to wide acclaim.

Musical Pilgrimages

- » Serge Gainsbourg grave, Cimetière du Montparnasse, Paris
- » Jim Morrison grave, Cimetière du Père Lachaise, Paris
- » La Cigale, Paris
- » Château des Millandes, the Dordogne
- » Le Lieu Unique, Nantes
- » Espace Georges Brassens, Sète

In the 1980s irresistible crooners Jean-Pierre Lang and Pierre Bachelet revived the *chanson* tradition with classics such as *Les Corons* (1982), a passionate ode to northern France's miners. Exciting contemporary performers of a genre clearly here to stay include Vincent Delerm, Bénabar, Jeanne Cherhal, Camille, Soha and a group called Les Têtes Raides. The next hip crooner on the scene, on Facebook and Youtube, is Arnaud Fleurent-Didier (www.arnaudfleurentdidier.com).

Rap

For contemporary younger folk, France is probably best known for its rap, an original 1990s sound spearheaded by Senegal-born, Paris-reared rapper MC Solaar and Suprême NTM (NTM being an acronym for a French expression far too offensive to print). Most big-name rappers are French 20-somethings of Arabic or African origin whose prime preoccupation is the frustrations and fury of fed-up immigrants in the French *banlieues* (suburbs). Take 20-something, hot-shot rapper Disiz La Peste, born in Amiens to a Senegalese father and French mother: his third album *Histoires Extra-Ordinaires d'un Jeune de Banlieue* (The Extraordinary Stories of a Youth in the Suburbs; 2005) did just what its title suggested, as did his 'last' album *Disiz the End* (2009), following which he morphed into Peter Punk (www.disizpeterpunk.com) and created a very different rock-punk-electro sound with *Dans La Ventre du Crocodile* (In the Crocodile's Stomach; 2010).

Other rappers to listen out for include Monsieur R of Congolese origin, known for his hardcore, antiestablishment 'fuck everything' lyrics, which have landed him in court in the past; Parisian heavyweight Booba of Senegalese origin; ghetto kid Rohff (www.roh2f.com, in French) and the trio Malekal Morte.

One of France's few female rappers, Cyprus-born Diam's (short for 'diamant' meaning 'diamond'; www.diams-lesite.com), who arrived in Paris aged seven, was voted MTV's French Artist of the Year in 2007. Rap bands include Marseille's hugely successful home-grown IAM (www.iam.tn.fr, in French), five-piece band KDD from Toulouse and Brittany's Manau trio (www.manau.com, in French), who fuse hip hop with traditional Celtic sounds.

No artist has cemented France's reputation in world music more than Paris-born, Franco-Congolese rapper, slam poet and three-time Victoire de la Musique award winner, Abd al Malik (www.abdalmalik.fr). His albums *Gibraltar* (2006) and *Dante* (2008) are classics, and his latest album *Château Rouge* (2010) will undoubtedly follow suit.

Rock & Pop

One could be forgiven for thinking that French pop is becoming dynastic. The very distinctive M (for Mathieu) is the son of singer Louis Chédid; Arthur H is the progeny of pop-rock musician Jacques Higelin; and Thomas Dutronc is the offspring of 1960s idols Jacques and Françoise Hardy. And the Gainsbourg dynasty doesn't look like ending any time soon. Serge's daughter with Jane Birkin, Charlotte, released her third album at the end of 2009.

Noir Désir was *the* sound of French rock until its lead singer, Bertrand Cantat, was imprisoned for the murder of his girlfriend and it disbanded. Worth noting are Louise Attack, Mickey 3D and Nofsell, who sings in his very own invented language. The hottest group to emerge in recent years, Pony Pony Run Run (www.ponyponyrunrun.net), sing in English.

Cinematic Experiences

- » Musée Lumière, Lyon
- » Hangar du Premier Film, Lyon
- » Cannes Film Festival, Cannes
- » Musée Jean Cocteau, Menton
- » American Film Festival, Deauville

World

With styles from Algerian *rai* to other North African music (artists include Cheb Khaled, Natacha Atlas, Jamel, Cheb Mami) and Senegalese *mbalax* (Yousou N'Dour), West Indian zouk (Kassav', Zouk Machine) and Cuban salsa, France's world beat is strong. One musician who uses world elements to stunning effect is Manu Chao (www.manuchao.net), the Paris-born son of Spanish parents, whose albums are international best sellers.

In the late 1980s, bands Mano Negra and Les Nègresses Vertes combined many of these elements with brilliant results. Magic System from Côte d'Ivoire popularised *zouglou* (a kind of West African rap and dance music) with its album *Premier Gaou*, and Congolese Koffi Olomide still packs the halls. Watch for the blind singing couple, Amadou and Mariam, and Rokia Traoré from Mali.

Another hot musical export is Parisian electro-dance duo Daft Punk (www.daftalive.com), whose debut album *Homework* (1997) fused disco, house, funk and techno. Electronica duo Air (an acronym for 'Amour, Imagination, Rêve' meaning 'Love, Imagination, Dream') bagged a massive loyal following with its sensational album *Moon Safari* (1998) and didn't disappoint with its fifth, *Pocket Symphony* (2007). Then there is Rachid Taha, a Franco-Algerian DJ-turned-singer whose fifth album *Made in Medina* (2002) mixes Arab and Western musical styles to create an extraordinarily rich fusion of rock, punk, afro-pop, Algerian *rai*, salsa and pretty much you-name-it-it's-there. To add extra appeal there are song lyrics in English and Berber as well as French.

Painting

Prehistoric to Landscape

France's oldest known prehistoric cave paintings (created 31,000 years ago) adorn the Grotte Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc in the Rhône Valley and the underwater Grotte Cosquer near Marseille; neither can be visited.

According to Voltaire, French painting proper began with baroque painter Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), known for his classical mythological and biblical scenes bathed in golden light. Wind forward a couple of centuries and modern still life popped up with Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1699–1779). A century later, neoclassical artist Jacques Louis David (1748–1825) wooed the public with his vast portraits.

While Romantics such as Eugène Delacroix (find his grave in Paris' Cimetière du Père Lachaise) revamped the subject picture, the Barbizon School effected a parallel transformation of landscape painting. Barbizons included landscape artist Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875) and Jean-François Millet (1814–75). The son of a peasant farmer from Normandy, Millet took many of his subjects from

FRENCH CINEMA

1920s

French film flourishes. Sound ushers in René Clair's (1898–1981) world of fantasy and satirical surrealism.

Watch Abel Gance's antiwar blockbuster *J'Accuse!* (I Accuse!; 1919), filmed on actual WWI battlefields.

1930s

WWI inspires a new realism: portraits of ordinary lives dominate film. **Watch** *La Grande Illusion* (The Great Illusion; 1937), a devastating evocation of war's folly based on the trench warfare experience of director Jean Renoir.

1940s

Surrealists eschew realism. **Watch** Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (Beauty and the Beast; 1945) and *Orphée* (Orpheus; 1950). WWII saps the film industry of both talent and money.

1950s

Nouvelle Vague (New Wave) sees small budgets, no stars and real-life subject matter. **Watch** poverty and alcoholism in *Le Beau Serge* (Bitter Reunion; 1958), time and memory in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959).

1960s

France as the land of romance. **Watch** Claude Lelouch's *Un Homme et une Femme* (A Man and a Woman; 1966) and Jacques Demy's bittersweet *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (The Umbrellas of Cherbourg; 1964).

Modern Art Meccas

- » Monet's garden, Giverny
- » Renoir's studio, French Riviera
- » Picasso's château studio, Antibes
- » Musée Matisse, Nice
- » Cézanne's pad, Aix-en-Provence
- » Chemin du Fauvisme (Fauvism Trail), Collioure
- » La Piscine Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Lille
- » Les Abattoirs, Toulouse

peasant life, and reproductions of his *L'Angélus* (The Angelus; 1857) – the best-known painting in France after the *Mona Lisa* – are strung above mantelpieces all over rural France. The original hangs in Paris' Musée d'Orsay.

Realism & Impressionism

The Realists were all about social comment: Édouard Manet (1832–83) zoomed in on Parisian middle-class life and Gustave Courbet (1819–77) depicted the drudgery of the working class.

It was in a flower-filled garden in a Normandy village that Claude Monet (1840–1926) expounded Impressionism, a term of derision taken from the title of his experimental painting *Impression: Soleil Levant* (Impression: Sunrise; 1874). A trip to the Musée d'Orsay unveils a rash of other members of the school – Boudin, Sisley, Pissarro, Renoir, Degas and so on.

An arthritic-crippled Renoir painted out his last Impressionist days in a villa on the French Riviera. With a warmth and astonishing intensity of light hard to equal, the Riviera inspired dozens of artists post-Renoir: Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) is particularly celebrated for his post-Impressionist still lifes and landscapes done in Aix-en-Provence, where he was born and worked; Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) worked in Arles; while Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh (1853–90) painted Arles and St-Rémy-de-Provence. In St-Tropez pointillism took off: Georges Seurat (1859–91) was the first to apply paint in small dots or uniform brush strokes of unmixed colour, producing fine mosaics of warm and cool tones, but it was his pupil Paul Signac (1863–1935) who is best known for his pointillist works.

20th Century

Twentieth-century French painting is characterised by a bewildering diversity of styles, including cubism, and fauvism, which was named after the slur of a critic who compared the exhibitors at the 1906 autumn Salon in Paris with *fauves* (wild animals) because of their radical use of intensely bright colours. Spanish prodigy Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) was the man behind the former, and Henri Matisse (1869–1954) the latter. Both chose southern France to set up studio, Matisse living in Nice and Picasso opting for a 12th-century château (now the Musée Picasso) in Antibes. Cubism, as developed by Picasso and Georges Braque

LE 7ÈME ART: CINEMA CLASSICS

- » **La Règle du Jeu** (The Rules of the Game; 1939) Shunned by the public and censored, Jean Renoir's story of a 1930s bourgeois hunting party in the Loire Valley is dark and satirical.
- » **Et Dieu Créa la Femme** (And God Created Woman; 1956) Roger Vadim's tale of the amorality of modern youth made a star out of Brigitte Bardot and St-Tropez.
- » **Les quatre cents coups** (The 400 Blows; 1959) Partly based on the rebellious adolescence of New Wave director François Truffaut (1932–84).
- » **Diva** (1981) and **37°2 le matin** (Betty Blue; 1986) Two visually compelling films by Jean-Jacques Beineix. *Diva* stars French icon Richard Bohringer.
- » **Jean de Florette** (1986) Claude Berri's famous portrait of prewar Provence in southern France.
- » **Shoah** (1985) Claude Lanzmann's 9½-hour-long B&W documentary of interviews with Holocaust survivors worldwide took 11 years to make.
- » **Subway** (1985), **Le Grand Bleu** (The Big Blue; 1988), **Nikita** (1990) and **Jeanne d'Arc** (Joan of Arc; 1999) The pick of Luc Besson box-office hits.

(1882–1963), deconstructed the subject into a system of intersecting planes and presented various aspects of it simultaneously.

The early 20th century also saw the rise of the Dada movement, and no piece of French art better captures its rebellious spirit than Marcel Duchamp's *Mona Lisa*, complete with moustache and goatee. In 1922 German Dadaist Max Ernst moved to Paris and worked on surrealism, a Dada offshoot that drew on the theories of Freud to reunite the conscious and unconscious realms and permeate daily life with fantasies and dreams.

With the close of WWII, Paris' role as the artistic capital of the world ended, leaving critics ever since wondering where all the artists have gone. The focus shifted back to southern France in the 1960s with new realists such as Arman (1928–2005) and Yves Klein (1928–62), both from Nice. In 1960 Klein famously produced *Anthropométrie de l'Époque Bleue*, a series of imprints made by naked women (covered from head to toe in blue paint) rolling around on a white canvas – in front of an orchestra of violins and an audience in evening dress. A decade on the Supports/Surfaces movement deconstructed the concept of a painting, transforming one of its structural components (such as the frame or canvas) into a work of art instead.

Artists in the 1990s turned to the minutiae of everyday urban life to express social and political angst, using media other than paint to let rip. Conceptual artist Daniel Buren (b 1938) reduced his painting to a signature series of vertical 8.7cm-wide stripes that he applies to every surface imaginable – white marble columns in the courtyard of Paris' Palais Royal included. The painter (who in 1967, as part of the radical *groupe BMPT*, signed a manifesto declaring he was not a painter) was the *enfant terrible* of French art in the 1980s. Partner-in-crime Michel Parmentier (1938–2000) insisted on monochrome painting – blue in 1966, grey in 1967 and red in 1968.

Paris-born conceptual artist Sophie Calle (b 1953) brazenly exposes her private life in public with her eye-catching installations, which most recently involved 107 women – including Carla Bruni before she became First Lady – reading and interpreting an email she received from her French lover, dumping her. The resultant work of art – compelling and addictive – is published in the artist's book *Take Care of Yourself*.

Some contemporary art trendsetters worth a look: Palais de Tokyo, in Paris, Fondation Maeght, in St-Paul de Vence, Centre Pompidou-Metz, in Metz.

1970s

The limelight baton goes to lesser-known directors like Éric Rohmer (b 1920), who make beautiful but uneventful films in which the characters endlessly analyse their feelings.

1980s

Big-name stars, slick production values and nostalgia: generous state subsidies see film-makers switch to costume dramas and comedies in the face of growing competition from the USA.

1990s & New Millennium

Box-office hits starring France's best-known, biggest-nosed actor, Gérard Depardieu, win over huge audiences in France and abroad. **Watch** *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990) and *Astérix et Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre* (2002).



Architecture

From prehistoric megaliths around Carnac in Brittany to Vauban's 33 star-shaped citadels dotted around France to defend its 17th-century frontiers, French architecture has always been of *grand-projet* proportions.

Prehistoric to Roman

No part of France better demonstrates the work of the country's earliest architects than Brittany, which has more megalithic menhirs (monumental upright stones), tombs, cairns and burial chambers than anywhere else on earth. Many date from around 3500 BC and the most frequent structure is the dolmen, a covered burial chamber consisting of vertical menhirs topped by a flat capstone. Bizarrely, Brittany's ancient architects had different architectural tastes from their European neighbours – rather than the cromlechs (stone circles) commonly found in Britain, Ireland, Germany and Spain, they were much keener on building arrow-straight rows of menhirs known as *alignements*. And indeed, Carnac's monumental Alignements de Carnac is the world's largest known prehistoric structure.

The Romans left behind a colossal architectural legacy in Provence and the French Riviera. Thousands of men took three to five years to haul the 21,000 cu metres of local stone needed to build the Pont du Gard near Nîmes. Other fine pieces of Roman architecture, still operational, include amphitheatres in Nîmes and Arles, open-air theatres in Orange and Fréjus, and Nîmes' Maison Carrée.

Romanesque

A religious revival in the 11th century led to the construction of Romanesque churches, so-called because their architects adopted many architectural elements (eg vaulting) from Gallo-Roman buildings still standing at the time. Romanesque buildings typically have round arches, heavy walls, few windows and a lack of ornamentation that borders on the austere.

Romanesque masterpieces include Toulouse's Basilique St-Sernin, Poitiers' Église Notre Dame la Grande, the exquisitely haunting Basilique St-Rémi in Reims, Caen's twinset of famous Romanesque abbeys and Provence's trio in the Luberon (Sénanque, Le Thoronet and Silvacane). In Normandy the nave and south transept of the abbey-church on Mont St-Michel are beautiful examples of Norman Romanesque.

Then there is Burgundy's astonishing portfolio of Romanesque abbeys, among the world's finest.

Gothic

Avignon's pontifical palace is Gothic architecture on a gargantuan scale. The Gothic style originated in the mid-12th century in northern France, where the region's great wealth attracted the finest architects,

Big-Name Buildings

» **Frank Gehry**
Cinémathèque Française (Paris), Cité de la Vigne (Gruissan)

» **Jean Nouvel**
Institut du Monde Arabe and Fondation d'Art pour l'Art Contemporain (Paris), Les Docks Vauban (Le Havre)

» **Sir Norman Foster**
Carrée d'Art (Nîmes), Pont de Millau (Languedoc), Musée de la Préhistoire des Gorges du Verdon (Quinson)

engineers and artisans. Gothic structures are characterised by ribbed vaults carved with great precision, pointed arches, slender verticals, chapels (often built or endowed by the wealthy or by guilds), galleries and arcades along the nave and chancel, refined decoration and large stained-glass windows. If you look closely at certain Gothic buildings, however, you'll notice minor asymmetrical elements introduced to avoid monotony.

The world's first Gothic building was the Basilique de St-Denis near Paris, which combined various late-Romanesque elements to create a new kind of structural support in which each arch counteracted and complemented the next. The basilica served as a model for many other 12th-century French cathedrals, including Notre Dame de Paris and Chartres cathedral – both known for their soaring flying buttresses. No Gothic belfry is finer to scale than that of Bordeaux' Cathédrale St-André.

In the 14th century, the Radiant Gothic style developed, named after the radiating tracery of the rose windows, with interiors becoming even lighter thanks to broader windows and more translucent stained glass. One of the most influential Rayonnant buildings was Paris' Ste-Chapelle, whose stained glass forms a curtain of glazing on the 1st floor.

Renaissance

The Renaissance, which began in Italy in the early 15th century, set out to realise a 'rebirth' of classical Greek and Roman culture. It had its first impact on France at the end of that century, when Charles VIII began a series of invasions of Italy, returning with some new ideas.

To trace the shift from late Gothic to Renaissance, travel along the Loire Valley: typical of early Renaissance architecture, Château de Chambord illustrates the mix of classical components and decorative motifs (columns, tunnel vaults, round arches, domes etc) with the rich decoration of Flamboyant Gothic. See p370 for a pictorial look at this valley's astonishing architecture.

Mannerism, which followed Early Renaissance, was introduced by Italian architects and artists brought to France around 1530 by François I, whose royal château at Fontainebleau was designed by Italian architects. Over the following decades, French architects who had studied in Italy took over from their Italian colleagues. In 1635 early-baroque architect François Mansart (1598–1666) designed the classical wing of Château de Blois, while his younger rival, Louis Le Vau (1612–70), started work on Louis XIV's palace at Versailles.

The Mannerist style lasted until the early 17th century, when it was subsumed by the baroque style.

Baroque

During the baroque period (the tail end of the 16th to the late 18th centuries), painting, sculpture and classical architecture were integrated

Catch up with southern France's prehistoric architects at Marseille's Centre de la Vieille Charité, Quinson's Musée de la Préhistoire des Gorges du Verdon and the beehive-shaped huts called *bories* near Gordes in the Luberon.

BORIES

FRANCE'S MOST BEAUTIFUL VILLAGES

One of French architecture's signature structures popped up in rural France from the 13th century, 'up' being the operative word for these *bastides* or *villages perchés* (fortified hilltop villages) built high on a hill to afford maximum protection for previously scattered populations. Provence in the south of France and the Dordogne are key regions to hike up, down and around one medieval hilltop village after another, but you can find them in almost every French region. The most dramatic and stunning appear on France's list of *plus beaux villages* (most beautiful villages; www.les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org).

From the mid-17th century to the mid-19th century, the design of defensive fortifications around the world was dominated by the work of one man: Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707).

Born to a relatively poor family of the petty nobility, Vauban worked as a military engineer during almost the entire reign of Louis XIV, revolutionising both the design of fortresses and siege techniques. To defend France's frontiers, he built 33 immense citadels, many of them shaped like stars and surrounded by moats, and he rebuilt or refined more than 100. Vauban's most famous citadel is situated at Lille, but his work can also be seen at Antibes, Belfort, Belle Île, Besançon, Concarneau, Neuf-Brisach (Alsace), Perpignan, St-Jean Pied de Port and St-Malo. The Vauban citadel in Verdun comprises 7km of underground galleries. Since 2008, 13 sites (www.sites-vauban.org) star on Unesco's World Heritage list under a 'Vauban Fortifications' banner.

to create structures and interiors of great subtlety, refinement and elegance. Architecture became more pictorial, with the painted ceilings in churches illustrating the Passion of Christ to the faithful, and palaces invoking the power and order of the state.

Salomon de Brosse, who designed Paris' Palais du Luxembourg in 1615, set the stage for two of France's most prominent early-baroque architects: François Mansart (1598–1666), who designed the classical wing of Château de Blois, and his younger rival Louis Le Vau (1612–70), who worked on France's grandest palace at Versailles.

Neoclassicism

Nancy's place Stanislas in northern France is the country's loveliest neoclassical square. Neoclassical architecture, which emerged in about 1740 and remained popular until well into the 19th century, had its roots in the renewed interest in the classical forms and conventions of Graeco-Roman antiquity: columns, simple geometric forms and traditional ornamentation.

Among the earliest examples of this style is the Italianate facade of Paris' Église St-Sulpice, designed in 1733 by Giovanni Servandoni, which took inspiration from Christopher Wren's St Paul's Cathedral in London; and the Petit Trianon at Versailles, designed by Jacques-Ange Gabriel for Louis XV in 1761. France's greatest neoclassical architect of the 18th century was Jacques-Germain Soufflot, the man behind the Panthéon in Left Bank Paris.

Neoclassicism peaked under Napoleon III, who used it extensively for monumental architecture intended to embody the grandeur of imperial France and its capital: the Arc de Triomphe, La Madeleine, the Arc du Carrousel at the Louvre, the Assemblée Nationale building and the Palais Garnier.

The true showcase of this era though is Monte Carlo Casino in Monaco, created by French architect Charles Garnier (1825–98) in 1878. See p859 for details.

Art Nouveau

Art nouveau (1850–1910) combined iron, brick, glass and ceramics in ways never before seen. The style emerged in Europe and the USA under various names (Jugendstil, Sezessionstil, Stile Liberty) and caught on quickly in Paris. The style was characterised by sinuous curves and flowing, asymmetrical forms reminiscent of creeping vines, water lilies, the patterns on insect wings and the flowering boughs of trees. Influenced by the arrival of exotic *objets d'art* from Japan, its French

Architect-Buff Sleeps

» BLC Design Hôtel, L'Apostrophe, Cadran Hôtel & Kube Hôtel, Paris

» Les Bains Douches, Toulouse

» Hôtel Le Corbusier, Marseille

» Hôtel Negresco, Nice

» Hôtel 3.14, Cannes

» Zazpi, St-Jean de Luz

» L'Hermitage Gantois, Lille

name came from a Paris gallery that featured works in the 'new art' style. True buffs should make a beeline for the art nouveau tourist trail in Nancy (see p337).

A Beautiful Age

The glittering belle époque, hot on the heels of art nouveau, heralded an eclecticism of decorative stucco friezes, *trompe l'œil* paintings, glittering wall mosaics, brightly coloured Moorish minarets and Turkish towers. Immerse yourself in its fabulous and whimsical designs with a stroll along Promenade des Anglais in Nice, where the pink-domed Hôtel Negresco (1912) is the icing on the cake, or, up north, around the colourful Imperial Quarter of Metz. Or flop in a beautiful belle époque spa like Vichy.

Modern

The Fondation Vasarely by the 'father of op art' Victor Vasarely (1908–97) was an architectural coup when unveiled in Aix-en-Provence in 1976. Its 14 giant monumental hexagons reflected what Vasarely had already achieved in art: the creation of optical illusion and changing perspective through the juxtaposition of geometrical shapes and colours.

France's best-known 20th-century architect, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (better known as Le Corbusier; 1887–1965), was born in Switzerland but settled in Paris in 1917 at the age of 30. A radical modernist, he tried to adapt buildings to their functions in industrialised society without ignoring the human element, thus rewriting the architectural style book with his sweeping lines and functionalised forms adapted to fit the human form. Chapelle de Notre-Dame du Haut in the Jura and Couvent Ste-Marie de la Tourette near Lyon are 20th-century architectural icons.

Until 1968, French architects were still being trained almost exclusively at the conformist École de Beaux-Arts, which certainly shows in most of the early structures erected in the Parisian skyscraper district of La Défense and Montparnasse's ungainly 210m-tall Tour Montparnasse (1973).

Contemporary

French political leaders have long sought to immortalise themselves through the erection of huge public edifices aka *grands projects*. Georges Pompidou commissioned the Centre Pompidou (1977) in which the architects – in order to keep the exhibition halls as uncluttered as possible – put the building's insides out; Valéry Giscard d'Estaing transformed a derelict train station into the glorious Musée d'Orsay; and François Mitterrand commissioned the capital's best-known contemporary architectural landmarks (taxpayers' bill: a whopping €4.6 billion), including IM Pei's glass pyramid at the Louvre, the Opéra Bastille, the Grande Arche in La Défense and the four glass towers of the national

Art Nouveau in Paris

- » Hector Guimard's noodle-like metro entrances
- » Interior of the Musée d'Orsay
- » Department stores Le Bon Marché & Galeries Lafayette
- » Glass roof over the Grand Palais

France's biggest architectural scandals-turned-successes: Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers' Centre Pompidou, and IM Pei's glass pyramid at the Louvre, both in Paris.

BUILDING GREEN

A signature architectural feature of the French capital that has since been exported to other European cities is the vertical garden – *mur végétal* (vegetation wall) – especially that of Patrick Blanc (www.verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com). His most famous work is at the Musée du Quai Branly. Seeming to defy the very laws of gravity, the museum's vertical garden consists of some 15,000 low-light foliage plants from Central Europe, the USA, Japan and China planted on a surface of 800 sq metres and held in place by a frame of metal, PVC and nonbiodegradable felt – but no soil.

Architecture et Musique (www.architectemusique.com) is a fine concept: enjoy a classical-music concert amid an architectural masterpiece; the annual program is online.

library. Jacques Chirac's only *grand projet* was Jean Nouvel's iconic riverside museum, the Musée du Quai Branly.

In the provinces, notable buildings include Strasbourg's European Parliament, Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas's Euralille, Jean Nouvel's glass-and-steel Vesunna Musée Gallo-Romain in Périgueux, a 1920s art deco swimming pool-turned-art museum in Lille and the fantastic Louvre II in little Lens, 37km south of Lille. Also noteworthy are an 11th-century abbey-turned-monumental sculpture gallery in Angers and Le Havre's rejuvenated 19th-century docks.

Then, of course, there's one of the world's tallest bridges, the stunning Pont de Millau in Languedoc, designed by Sir Norman Foster. Other bridges worth noting for their architectural ingenuity are Normandy's Pont de Normandie (1995) near Le Havre and Paris' striking Passerelle Simone de Beauvoir (2006). Both cross the Seine.

One of the most beautiful and successful of France's contemporary buildings is the Institut du Monde Arabe (1987), a highly praised structure in Paris that successfully mixes modern and traditional Arab and Western elements. It was designed by Jean Nouvel, France's leading and arguably most talented architect. His current project, the ambitious Philharmonie de Paris (2014), will have an auditorium of 2400 'terrace' seats surrounding the orchestra. Daring duo Shigeru Ban (Tokyo) and Jean de Gastines (Paris) are the *tour de force* behind the very white, bright Centre Pompidou-Metz (2010).

Looking south, Frank Gehry is the big-name architect behind Arles' innovative new cultural centre: all ashimmer in the bright southern sun, rocklike Fondation Luma (2013) evokes the nearby Alpilles mountain range with its two linked towers topped with aluminium. Sir Norman Foster is busy designing a new yacht club for Monaco (2012) and in Lyon, a shimmering glass-and-steel cloud will rise out of the wasteland at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône Rivers.



Lyrical Landscapes

The Land

France is a land of art. Fantastic portraits and paintings adorn the walls of galleries big and small, villages throughout the land look like oil paintings of a bygone rural age and the people, with their natural sense of style, could be called works of art themselves. But as gorgeous as the manmade art of France is, it fades when compared to the sheer beauty of the countryside itself.

Hexagon-shaped France, the largest country in Europe after Russia and the Ukraine, is encircled by water or mountains along every side except in the northeast.

The country's 3200km-long coastline is incredibly diverse, ranging from white-chalk cliffs (Normandy) and treacherous promontories (Brittany) to broad expanses of fine sand (Atlantic coast) and pebbly beaches (the Mediterranean coast).

Western Europe's highest peak, Mont Blanc (4810m), spectacularly crowns the French Alps, which stagger along France's eastern border. North of Lake Geneva, the gentle limestone Jura Mountains run along the Swiss frontier to reach heights of around 1700m, while the rugged Pyrenees define France's 450km-long border with Spain and Andorra, peaking at 3404m.

Five major river systems criss-cross the country: the Garonne (which includes the Tarn, the Lot and the Dordogne) empties into the Atlantic; the Rhône links Lake Geneva and the Alps with the Mediterranean; Paris is licked in poetic verse by the Seine, which slithers through the

WILDLIFE

Travellers Nature Guides: France by Bob Gibbons is the definitive guide to where to watch wildlife in France.

HIGH-FACTOR PROTECTION

Over 10% of the coastline of mainland France and Corsica is managed by the **Conservatoire du Littoral** (www.conservatoire-du-littoral.fr), a public coastal-protection body that acquires – sometimes by expropriation – threatened natural areas by the sea in order to restore, rejuvenate and protect them.

Among the *conservatoire's* rich pageant of *espaces naturels protégés* (protected natural areas) are the rare-orchid-dotted sand dunes east of Dunkirk, the Baie de Somme with its ornithological park, several wet and watery pockets of the horse-studded Camargue, and a Corsican desert. (The Désert des Agriates covers 16,000 hectares of wilderness between the towns of St-Florent and La Balagne – not so long ago a highly fertile area but today a barren landscape due to severe soil erosion resulting from human activities).

For a list of France's 24 **Ramsar Convention wetland sites**, see www.wetlands.org/rsis.

FERUS

Follow the progress of France's precious wolf, bear and lynx populations with FERUS, France's conservation group for the wellbeing of these protected predators, online at www.ferus.org, in French.

city en route from Burgundy to the English Channel; and tributaries of the North Sea-bound Rhine drain much of the area north and east of the capital. Then there's France's longest river, the château-studded Loire, which meanders through history from the Massif Central to the Atlantic.

Wildlife

France is blessed with a rich variety of flora and fauna, although few habitats have escaped human-induced impacts: intensive agriculture, wetland draining, urbanisation, hunting and the encroachment of industry and tourism infrastructure menace dozens of species.

Animals

France has more mammal species (around 135 including marine mammals and some introduced species) than any other country in Europe. Couple this with around 500 bird species (depending on which rare migrants are included), 40 types of amphibian, 36 varieties of reptile and 72 kinds of fish, and wildlife-watchers are in paradise. Of France's 40,000 identified insect species, 10,000 creep and crawl in the Parc National du Mercantour in the Alps.

High-altitude plains in the Alps and the Pyrenees shelter the marmot, which hibernates from October to April and has a shrill and distinctive whistle; the nimble chamois (mountain antelope), with its dark-striped head; and the *bouquetin* (Alpine ibex; see p952), which can be seen in large numbers in the Parc National de la Vanoise. Mouflons (wild mountain sheep), introduced in the 1950s, clamber over stony sunlit scree slopes in the mountains; while red and roe deer and wild boar are common in lower-altitude forested areas. The Alpine hare welcomes winter with its white coat, while 19 of Europe's 29 bat species hang out in the dark in the Alpine national parks.

The *loup* (wolf), which disappeared from France in the 1930s, returned to the Parc National du Mercantour in 1992 – much to the horror of the mouflon (on which it preys) and local sheep farmers. Dogs, corrals and sound machines have been used as an effective, nonlethal way of keeping the growing free-roaming wolf population of the Mercantour and other Alpine areas from feasting on domesticated sheep herds.

WHERE TO WATCH WILDLIFE

The national parks and their regional siblings offer all sorts of options to visitors who are keen to observe animals in their natural habitat, including nature walks with an expert guide. Details are in the regional chapters. The following (at non-national parks) are also worth a gander:

- » Ten thousand flamingos in the Camargue, the best-known wetland site in France, as well as over 400 bird species including rollers and glossy ibis.
- » Vultures in the Pyrenees at Falaise aux Vautours (Cliff of the Vultures) in the Vallée d'Ossau and in Languedoc at the Belvédère des Vautours in the Parc Naturel Régional des Grands Causses.
- » Storks in Alsace at the Centre de Réintroduction des Cigognes, in Hunawihr, and the Enclos aux Cigognes in Munster; on the Atlantic coast at Le Teich Parc Ornithologique and the Parc Ornithologique du Marquenterre; and at the Parc des Oiseaux outside Villars-les-Dombes near Lyon.

Other easy-to-reach and highly rewarding areas for wildlife include the Forêt de Fontainebleau outside Paris, the Marais Poitevin on the Atlantic coast, the stunning underwater life between Cerbère and Banyuls, and the central mountains of Corsica, around Corte.

The brown bear disappeared from the Alps in the mid-1930s. The 150-odd native bears living in the Pyrenees a century ago had dwindled to one orphaned cub following the controversial shooting of its mother – the last female bear of Pyrenean stock – by a hunter in 2004. However another 12 to 18 bears of Slovenian origin also call the French and Spanish Pyrenees home, though the reintroduction program has faced fierce opposition from sheep herders (see the boxed text, p671).

A rare but wonderful treat is the sighting of an *aigle royal* (golden eagle): 40 pairs nest in the Parc National du Mercantour, 20 pairs nest in the Vanoise, 30-odd in the Écrins and some 50 in the Pyrenees. Other birds of prey include the peregrine falcon, the kestrel, the buzzard and the bearded vulture, with its bone-breaking habits. The last – Europe's largest bird of prey, with an awe-inspiring wingspan of 2.8m – was extinct in the Alps from the 19th century until the 1980s, when it was reintroduced. More recently, the small, pale-coloured Egyptian vulture (once worshipped by the Egyptians, hence its name) has been spreading throughout the Alps and Pyrenees.

Even the eagle-eyed will have difficulty spotting the ptarmigan, a chickenlike species that moults three times a year to ensure a foolproof camouflage for every season (brown in summer, white in winter). It lives on rocky slopes and in Alpine meadows above 2000m. The nutcracker, with its loud and buoyant singsong and larch-forest habitat, the black grouse, rock partridge, the very rare eagle owl and the three-toed woodpecker are among the other 120-odd species to keep birdwatchers on their toes in highland realms.

Elsewhere on the French watch-the-birdie front, there are now 12,000 pairs of white storks – up from seven breeding pairs in 1974; 10% of the world's flamingo population hangs out in the Camargue; giant black cormorants – some with a wingspan of 170cm – on an island off Pointe du Grouin on the north coast of Brittany; and unique seagull and fishing-eagle populations in the Réserve Naturelle de Scandola on Corsica. The *balbuzard pêcheur* (osprey), a migratory hunter that winters in Africa and returns to France in February or March, today only inhabits two regions of France: Corsica and the Loire Valley area.

Plants

About 140,000 sq km of forest – beech, oak and pine in the main – covers 20% of France, while 4900 different species of native flowering plant countrywide (2250 alone grow in the Parc National des Cévennes). In forests in the Champagne region, mutant beech trees grow in a bizarrely stunted, malformed shape in Parc Natural Régional de la Montagne de Reims.

The Alpine and Pyrenean regions nurture fir, spruce and beech forests on north-facing slopes between 800m and 1500m. Larch trees, mountain and arolla pines, rhododendrons and junipers stud shrubby subalpine zones between 1500m and 2000m; and a brilliant riot of spring and summertime wildflowers carpets grassy meadows above the treeline in the alpine zone (up to 3000m).

Alpine blooms include the single golden-yellow flower of the arnica, which has long been used in herbal and homeopathic bruise-relieving remedies; the flame-coloured fire lily; and the hardy Alpine columbine, with its delicate blue petals. The protected 'queen of the Alps' (aka the Alpine eryngo) bears an uncanny resemblance to a purple thistle but is, in fact, a member of the parsley family (to which the carrot also belongs).

The rare twinflower only grows in the Parc National de la Vanoise. Of France's 150 orchids, the black vanilla orchid is one to look out for – its small red-brown flowers exude a sweet vanilla fragrance.

Find out what to spot, where and when with the Ligue de Protection des Oiseaux (LPO; League for the Protection of Birds; www.lpo.fr, in French) and its regional *délégations* (on the website under 'Nos sites web').

Spotted a bearded vulture? Lucky you! Note down when, where, any distinguishing marks and the bird's behaviour patterns and send the details to the Bearded Vulture Reintroduction into the Alps project at www.wild.unizh.ch/bg.

Corsica and the Massif des Maures, west of St-Tropez on the Côte d'Azur, are closely related botanically: both have chestnut and cork-oak trees (the bark of which gets stuffed in bottles) and are thickly carpeted with *garrigues* and *maquis* – heavily scented scrubland, where dozens of fragrant shrubs and herbs find shelter.

National Parks

The proportion of protected land in France is surprisingly low, relative to the size of the country. Six small *parcs nationaux* (national parks; www.parcsnationaux-fr.com) fully protect just 0.8% of the country. Another 13% (70,000 sq km) in metropolitan France and its overseas territories, with three million inhabitants, is protected to a substantially lesser degree by 45 *parcs naturels régionaux* (regional nature parks; www.parcs-naturels-regionaux.tm.fr; in French), and a further few per cent by 320 smaller *réserves naturelles* (nature reserves; www.reserves-naturelles.org), some of them under the eagle eye of the Conservatoire du Littoral.

While the central zones of national parks are uninhabited and fully protected by legislation (dogs, vehicles and hunting are banned and camping is restricted), their delicate ecosystems spill over into populated peripheral zones in which economic activities, some of them environmentally unfriendly, are permitted and even encouraged.

Most regional nature parks and reserves were established not only to improve (or at least maintain) local ecosystems, but also to encourage economic development and tourism in areas suffering from economic hardship and diminishing populations (such as the Massif Central and Corsica).

Select pockets of nature – the Pyrenees, Mont St-Michel and its bay, part of the Loire Valley and a clutch of capes on Corsica – have been declared Unesco World Heritage Sites.

Environmental Issues

The threats to France's environment are many and varied.

As elsewhere in the world, wetlands – incredibly productive ecosystems that are essential for the survival of birds, reptiles, fish and amphibians – are shrinking. More than 20,000 sq km (3% of French territory) are considered important wetlands but only 4% of this land is currently protected.

Great tracts of forest land burn each summer, often because of careless day-trippers but occasionally, as is sometimes reported in the Maures and Estérel ranges on the Côte d'Azur, because they're intentionally torched by people hoping to get licences to build on the damaged lands. Since the mid-1970s, between 31 sq km and 615 sq km of land has been reduced to a black stubble each year by an average of 540 fires – although overall, as prevention and fire-fighting improve, the number of fires is falling, according to the Office National des Forêts (www.onf.fr; in French), the national forestry commission responsible for public forests in France.

Dogs and guns also pose a threat to French animal life, brown bears included (see also p671). While the number of hunters has fallen by more than 20% in the last decade, there are still a lot more hunters in France (1.3 million) than in any other Western European country.

Despite the 1979 Brussels Directive for the protection of wild birds, their eggs, nests and habitats in the EU, the French government has been very slow to make its provisions part of French law, meaning birds that can fly safely over other countries can still be hunted as they cross France. A good handful of birds – estimated at at least 1000 birds of prey a year – are found to be electrocuted by high-voltage power lines.

Guide de la Nature en France by Michel Viard is an excellent field guide to the most commonly seen plants, birds and animals of France. It's in French but the glossy photos are universal.

Check out the wildlife-watching holidays in France offered by UK-based tour company Nature Trek (www.naturetrek.co.uk). These range from butterfly-spotting in Normandy to explorations of the wetlands of the Carmargue.

NATIONAL PARKS AT A GLANCE

PARK	FEATURES	ACTIVITIES	WHEN TO GO
Parc National des Cévennes (p733)	wild peat bogs, granite peaks, ravines & ridges bordering the Massif Central & Languedoc (910 sq km); red deer, beavers, vultures, wolves, bison	walking, donkey trekking, mountain biking, horse riding, cross-country skiing, caving, canoeing, botany (2250 plant species)	spring & winter
Parc National des Écrins (p502)	glaciers, glacial lakes & mountaintops soaring up to 4102m in the French Alps (1770 sq km); marmots, lynx, ibex, chamois, bearded vultures	walking, climbing, hang-gliding & para-gliding; kayaking	spring & summer
Parc National du Mercantour (p815)	Provence at its most majestic with 3000m-plus peaks & dead-end valleys along the Italian border; marmots, mouflons, chamois, ibex, wolves, golden & short-toed eagles, bearded vultures; Bronze Age petroglyphs	alpine skiing, white-water sports, mountain biking, walking, donkey trekking	spring, summer & winter
Parc National de Port-Cros (p853)	island marine park off the Côte d'Azur forming France's smallest national park & Europe's first marine park (700 hectares & 1288 hectares of water); puffins, shearwaters, migratory birds	snorkelling, bird-watching, swimming, gentle strolling	summer & autumn (for birdwatching)
Parc National des Pyrénées (p669)	100km of mountains along the Spanish border (457 sq km); marmots, izzards, brown bears, golden eagles, vultures, buzzards	alpine & cross-country skiing, walking, mountaineering, rock-climbing, white-water sports, canoeing, kayaking, mountain biking	spring, summer & winter
Parc National de la Vanoise (p495)	postglacial mountain landscape of Alpine peaks, beech-fir forests & 80 sq km of glaciers forming France's first national park (530 sq km); chamois, ibex, marmots, golden eagles; bearded vultures	alpine & cross-country skiing, walking, mountaineering, mountain biking	spring, summer & winter

The state-owned electricity company, Electricité de France, has an enviable record on minimising greenhouse-gas emissions – fossil-fuel-fired power plants account for just 4.6% of its production. Clean, renewable hydropower, generated by 220 dams, comprises 8.8% of the company's generating capacity but this does affect animal habitats.

The nippy *bouquetin des Alpes* (Alpine ibex), with its imposingly large, curly-wurly horns (we're talking 1m long and a good 5kg in weight) and a penchant for hanging out on sickeningly high crags and ledges, is the animal most synonymous with the French Alps. In the 16th century, higher altitudes were loaded with the handsome beast, the males spraying themselves with urine and sporting a strong body odour. Three centuries on, however, its extravagant and unusual horns had become a must-have item in any self-respecting gentleman's trophy cabinet, and within a few years the Alpine ibex had been hunted to the brink of extinction.

In 1963 the Parc National de la Vanoise was created in the Alps to stop hunters in the Vanoise massif from shooting the few Alpine ibex that remained. The creation of similar nature reserves and the pursuit of rigorous conservation campaigns to protect the animal have seen populations surely and steadily recover – to the point where today the Alpine ibex is thriving. Not that you're likely to encounter one: the canny old ibex has realised that some mammals are best avoided.

On a less positive note, ibex also used to thrive in the Pyrenees but in a pattern that mirrored that of the Alpine populations, ibex numbers tumbled until, by 1900, only around 100 of them remained. Unlike in the Alps, though, protection measures never worked here and, in January 2000, the Pyrenean Ibex finally became extinct when the last surviving female was killed by a falling tree. Or did they become extinct? Nine years after the wiping out of the species the Pyrenean ibex became, for seven minutes, the first species in history to become 'un-extinct' when a cloned female was born alive before dying of breathing difficulties.

And no less than 75% (the highest in the world) of France's electricity comes from another controversial carbon-zero source: nuclear power, generated by 59 nuclear reactors at 20 sites.

The world's most ambitious nuclear-power program will soon have a new reactor, Flamanville 3 on Normandy's west coast near Cherbourg, due for completion in 2012.

As energy demands increase and global warming looms ever larger in the public energy debate, France's continuing commitment to nuclear power – a position that looked risky and retrograde after Chernobyl, whose fallout raised radiation levels in Alsace, the Lyon and Nice regions and Corsica – now seems possibly prescient. In July 2008 radioactive leaks occurred at two French nuclear-power stations and, perhaps because of this, for the first time French public opinion is now more anti (57%) than pro nuclear power. What is certain, though, is that nuclear energy has helped France meet its Kyoto targets without having to make many inconvenient cuts in its energy use. Learn the official version of how spent nuclear fuel is reprocessed by visiting France's La Hague Reprocessing plant (www.lahague.areva-nc.com), 25km west of Cherbourg on the Cotentin Peninsula in Normandy.

Europe's largest solar-powered electricity-generating station is being built on a 1000m-high, south-facing slope near the tiny Provence village of Curbans. The 300-hectare array of photovoltaic cells, which will eventually produce 33 megawatts, is supposed to generate its first commercial watt in 2011. This will remove 120,000 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide annually from the French energy bill.



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Directory

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Accommodation

Be it a fairy-tale château, a boutique hideaway or a mountain refuge, France has accommodation to suit every taste and pocket. In this guide we've listed reviews by author preference.

Categories

As a rule of thumb, budget covers everything from bare-bones hostels to simple family-run places; midrange means a few extra creature comforts such as satellite TV and free wi-fi; while top end places stretch from luxury five-star chains with air conditioning, swimming pools and restaurants to boutique-chic chalets in the Alps.

Costs

Accommodation costs vary wildly between regions: what will buy you a night in a romantic *chambre d'hôte* (B&B) in the countryside may only get you a dorm bed in major cities and ski resorts; see individual chapters to gauge costs.

Price Icons

The price indicators in this book refer to the cost of a double room, including

private bathroom (any combination of toilet, bathtub, shower and washbasin) and excluding breakfast unless otherwise noted. Breakfast is assumed to be included at a B&B. Where half board (breakfast and dinner) and full board (breakfast, lunch and dinner) is included, this is mentioned in the price.

CATEGORY	COST
€ budget	< €70 (< €80 in Paris)
€€ midrange	€70–175 (€80–180)
€€€ top end	> €175 (> €180 in Paris)

Reservations

Some tourist offices make room reservations, often for a fee of €5, but many only do so if you stop by in person. In the Alps, many tourist offices for ski resorts run a central reservation service for booking accommodation.

Seasons

» Rates in this guide are high season.
 » In ski resorts, high season is Christmas and New Year, and the February–March school holidays.

» On the coast, high season is summer, particularly August.

» Hotels in inland cities charge low-season rates in summer.

» Rates often drop outside the high season – in some cases by as much as 50%.

» In business-oriented hotels in cities, rooms are most expensive from Monday to Thursday and cheaper over the weekend.

» In the Alps, hotels usually close between seasons, from around May to mid-June and from mid-September to early December.

B&Bs

For charm, a heartfelt *bienvenue* (welcome) and solid home cooking, it's hard to beat France's privately run *chambres d'hôte* (B&Bs), which are urban rarities but are plentiful in rural areas. Many hosts prepare an evening meal (*table d'hôte*) for an extra charge of around €20 to €30. Pick up lists of *chambres d'hôte* at local tourist offices, or find one to suit your style on the following websites:

Bienvenue à la Ferme

(www.bienvenue-a-la-ferme.com) Escape to the country at a *chambre d'hôte* on a farm. You can search online or order a catalogue.

Chambres d'Hôtes France

(www.chambresdhotessfrance.com) Great choice of B&Bs, all searchable by region.

en France

(www.bbfrance.com) A selection of B&Bs and *gîtes* (cottages) from Bordeaux to Brittany.

Fleurs de Soleil

(<http://fleursdesoleil.fr>, in French) Has a click-happy map of France showing *chambres d'hôte* by region.

Gîtes de France

(www.gites-de-france.fr) Acts as an umbrella organisation for B&Bs. Check out their catalogue *Gîtes de Charme* (www.gites-de-france-charme.com), or ask at local tourist offices about Gîtes de France brochures.

CAMPING CHIC

Farewell clammy canvas, adieu inflatable mattress... In recent years, camping in France has gone cool and creative, with *écologie chic* (eco-chic) and adventurous alternatives springing up all the time. If you fancy doing a Robinson Crusoe by staying in a tree house with an incredible view over the treetops, check out **Les Cabanes de France** (www.cabanes-de-france.com, in French), which covers leafy options all over France. Prefer to keep your feet firmly on the ground? Keep an eye out for eco-conscious campsites where you can snooze in a *tipi* (tepee) or in a giant hammock.

Samedi Midi Éditions (www.samedimidi.com) Country, mountain, seaside... choose your *chambre d'hôte* by location.

Camping

Camping in France is still very much in vogue, with thousands of well-equipped campgrounds across the country, many scenically located near rivers, lakes and the sea. Gîtes de France and Bienvenue à la Ferme coordinate camping on farms.

» Most campgrounds open from March or April to October; popular spots fill up fast in summer when it is wise to call ahead.

» In this book, 'sites' refer to fixed-price deals for two people including a tent and a car. Otherwise the price is broken down per adult/tent/car. Factor in a few extra euro per night for *taxe de séjour* (holiday tax) and electricity.

» Euro-economisers should look out for the good-value but no-frills *campings municipaux* (municipal campgrounds).

» If tents leave you cold, some campgrounds offer mobile homes with mod cons from heating to satellite TV.

» Camping in nondesignated spots (*camping sauvage*) is illegal in France.

» Campsite offices often close during the day, but a growing number have a PIN

code system so you can enter and leave when you choose.

» Getting to and from many campgrounds without your own transport can be slow and costly.

» Easy-to-navigate websites with campsites searchable by location, theme and facilities:

Camping en France (www.camping.fr)

Camping France (www.campingfrance.com)

Guide du Camping (www.guideducamping.com)

HPA Guide (<http://camping.hpaguide.com>)

Homestays

One of the best ways to brush up your *français* and immerse yourself in local life is by staying with a French family under an arrangement known as *hôtes payants* or *hébergement chez l'habitant*. Popular among students and young people, this set up means you rent a room and usually have access (sometimes limited) to the bathroom and the kitchen; meals may also be available. If you are sensitive

to smoke or pets make sure you mention this. The following organisations arrange homestays:

Accueil Familial des Jeunes Étrangers (www.ajfe-paris.org) Homestays in or near Paris from €555 a month with breakfast.

France Lodge (www.apartments-in-paris.com) Accommodation in private Parisian homes; €30 to €55 a night for one person, €40 to €80 for two.

Homestay France (www.homestaybooking.com/homestay-france) Homestays in major French cities from €105 per week.

Hostels

Hostels in France range from funky to threadbare; some are little more than a few spartan rooms set aside in a hostel for young workers (*foyer de jeunes travailleurs/travailleuses*), while others are hip hang-outs with perks aplenty.

» In university towns, *foyers d'étudiant* (student dormitories) are sometimes converted for use by travellers during summer.

» A dorm bed in an *auberge de jeunesse* (youth hostel) costs about €25 in Paris, and anything from €10.50 to €28 in the provinces, depending on location, amenities and facilities; sheets and breakfast are often included.

» To prevent outbreaks of bed bugs, sleeping bags are no longer permitted.

» Hostels by the sea or in the mountains sometimes offer seasonal outdoor activities.

» All hostels are totally nonsmoking.

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews by Lonely Planet authors, check out hotels.lonelyplanet.com/France. You'll find independent reviews, as well as recommendations on the best places to stay. Best of all, you can book online.

You'll need to purchase an annual Hostelling International card (€11/16 for under/over 26s) or a nightly Welcome Stamp (€1.80 to €2.90, up to a maximum of six) to stay at the two major French hostelling associations: **Fédération Unie des Auberges de Jeunesse** (www.fuaj.org, in French) and **Ligue Française pour les Auberges de la Jeunesse** (www.auberges-de-jeunesse.com).

Hotels

In this book we have tried to feature well-situated, independent hotels that offer good value, a warm welcome, at least a bit of charm and a palpable sense of place.

Hotels in France are rated with one to five stars, although the ratings are based on highly objective criteria (eg the size of the entry hall), not the quality of the service, the decor or cleanliness. For this reason star ratings are not quoted in the reviews in this book.

» French hotels almost never include breakfast in their rates. Unless specified otherwise, prices quoted in this guide don't include breakfast, which costs around €7/10/20 in a budget/midrange/top-end hotel.

» When you book, hotels usually ask for a credit-card number and, occasionally, written (faxed) confirmation; some require a deposit.

» A double room generally has one double bed (often two pushed-together singles!); a room with twin beds (*deux lits*) is usually more expensive, as is a room with a bathtub instead of a shower.

» Feather pillows are practically nonexistent in France, even in top-end hotels.

» All hotel restaurant terraces allow smoking; if you are sensitive to smoke sit inside or carry a respirator.

CHAIN HOTELS

France's chain hotels stretch from nondescript establishments near the autoroute

to central four-star hotels with character. Most conform to certain standards of decor, service and facilities (air conditioning, free wi-fi, 24-hour check-in etc), and offer competitive rates and last-minute and/or weekend deals. The countrywide biggies include the following:

B&B Hôtels (www.hotel-bb.com) Cheap motel-style digs.

Best Western (www.bestwestern.com) Independent two- to four-star hotels, each with its own local character.

WHICH FLOOR?

In France, as elsewhere in Europe, 'ground floor' refers to the floor at street level; the 1st floor – what would be called the 2nd floor in the US – is the floor above that.

This book follows local usage of the terms.

PRACTICALITIES

» **Classifieds** Pick up the free *FUSAC* (France USA Contacts; www.fusac.fr) in Anglophone haunts in Paris for classified ads about housing, babysitting, jobs and language exchanges.

» **Laundry** Virtually all French cities and towns have at least one *laverie libre-service* (self-service laundrette). The machines run on coins – bring plenty in various denominations in case the change-maker is on the fritz.

» **Newspapers & Magazines** Locals read their news in centre-left, highly intellectual *Le Monde* (www.lemonde.fr), right-leaning *Le Figaro* (www.lefigaro.fr) or left-leaning *Libération* (www.liberation.fr).

» **Radio** For news, tune in to the French-language France Info (105.5MHz), the multi-language RFI (738kHz or 89MHz in Paris) or, in northern France, the BBC World Service (648kHz) and BBC Radio 4 (198kHz). Popular national FM music stations include NRJ (www.nrj.fr, in French), Skyrock (www.skyrock.fm, in French) and Nostalgie (www.nostalgie.fr, in French).

» **Smoking** Smoking is illegal in all indoor public spaces, including restaurants and pubs (though, of course, smokers still light up on the terraces outside) – and, to the surprise of some, the law is actually obeyed!

» **Travel Conditions** In many areas, Autoroute Info (107.7MHz) has round-the-clock traffic information.

» **TV & Video** TV is Secam; videos work on the PAL system.

» **Weights & Measures** France uses the metric system.

Campanile (www.campanile.com) Good value hotels geared up for families.

Citôtel (www.citotel.com) Independent two- and three-star hotels.

Contact Hôtel (www.contact-hotel.com) Inexpensive two- and three-star hotels.

Etap (www.etaphotel.com) Ubiquitous chain.

Formule 1 (www.hotelformule1.com) Nondescript roadside cheapie.

Ibis (www.ibishotel.com) Midrange pick.

Inter-Hotel (www.inter-hotel.fr) Two- and three-star hotels, some quite charming.

Kyriad (www.kyriad.com) Comfortable midrange choices.

Novotel (www.novotel.com) Family-friendly chain.

Première Classe (www.premiereclasse.com) Motel-style accommodation.

Sofitel (www.sofitel.com) Range of top-end hotels in major French cities.

Refuges & Gîtes d'Étape

» *Refuges* (mountain huts or shelters) are bog-basic cabins established along trails in uninhabited mountainous areas and operated by national-park authorities, the **Club Alpin Français** (www.ffc.fr, in French) or other private organisations.

» *Refuges* are marked on hiking and climbing maps.

» A bunk in the dorm generally costs €10 to €20. Hot meals are sometimes available and, in a few cases, mandatory, pushing the price up to €30 or beyond.

» Advance reservations and a weather check are essential before setting out.

» *Gîtes d'étape*, better equipped and more comfortable than *refuges* (some even have showers), are situated along walking trails in less remote areas, often villages.

» Your first port of call should be **Gîtes d'Étape et Refuges** (www.gites-refuges.com), covering 4,000 *gîtes d'étape* and *refuges*.

Rental Accommodation

If you are planning on staying put for more than a few days or are travelling in a group, renting a furnished studio, apartment or villa can be an economical alternative. You will have the chance to live like a local, with trips to the farmers market and the *boulangerie*.

Finding an apartment for long-term rental can be gruelling. Landlords, many of whom prefer locals to foreigners, usually require substantial proof of financial responsibility and sufficient funds in France; many ask for a *caution* (guarantee) and a hefty deposit.

» *Gîtes de France* handles some of the most charming *gîtes ruraux* (self-contained holiday cottages) in rural areas.

» Cleaning, linen rental and electricity fees usually cost extra.

» Classified ads appear in *De Particulier à Particulier* (www.pap.fr, in French), published on Thursday and sold at newsstands.

» For apartments outside Paris it's best to search at your destination.

» Check places like bars and *tabacs* (tobacconists) for free local newspapers (often named after the number of the *département*) with classified listings.

Activities

From the glaciers, rivers and canyons of the Alps to the volcanic peaks of the Massif Central – not to mention 3200km of coastline stretching from Italy to Spain and from the Basque country to the Straits of Dover – France's spirit-lifting landscapes beg exhilarating outdoor escapes.

For details on regional activities, courses, equipment hire, clubs and companies, see this book's On the Road chapters and get in contact with local tourist offices.

Organisations

Whether you are a peak bagger, a surfer dude or a thrill-seeking mountain biker, the following organisations can help you plan your *petit* adventure:

CYCLING

Fédération Française de Cyclisme (www.ffc.fr, in French) Founded in 1881, the French Cycling Federation is the authority on competitive cycling in France and mountain biking (VTT), including freeriding, cross-country and downhill.

Fédération Française de Cyclotourisme (www.ffct.org, in French) This organisation promotes bicycle touring and mountain biking.

Union Touristique Les Amis de la Nature (<http://troisv.amis-nature.org>, in French) Has details on local, regional and long-distance *véloroutes* (cycling routes) around France.

Véloroutes et Voies

Vertes (www.af3v.org) A database of 250 signposted *véloroutes* (bike paths) and

ONLINE DEALS

Try these websites for deals on last-minute accommodation in France:

- » alpharooms.com
- » lastminute.com
- » laterooms.com
- » priceline.com
- » quickrooms.com

WALK THE WALK

The French countryside is criss-crossed by a staggering 120,000km of **sentiers balisés** (marked walking paths), which pass through every imaginable terrain in every region of the country. No permit is needed to hike. Probably the best-known walking trails are the **sentiers de grande randonnée (GR)**, long-distance paths marked by red-and-white-striped track indicators.

See p963 for recommended maps and *topoguides* (walking guides).

voies vertes (greenways) for cycling and in-line skating.

GLIDING

Fédération Française de Vol à Voile (FFV) (www.ffv.org, in French) Provides details of *vol à voile* (gliding) clubs countrywide.

Fédération Française de Vol Libre (<http://federation.ffvl.fr>, in French) Groups regional clubs specialising in *deltaplane* (hang-gliding), *parapente* (paragliding) and *le kite-surf* (kitesurfing).

MOUNTAIN & SNOW SPORTS

Club Alpin Français (French Alpine Club; www.ffcam.fr, in French) This highly regarded organisation groups 280 local mountain sports clubs and arranges professional

guides for *escapades in alpinisme* (mountaineering), *escalade* (rock climbing), *escalade de glace* (ice climbing) and other highland activities. They also run many of the *refuges* (mountain huts) in the French Alps.

École du Ski Français (ESF; French Ski School; www.esf.net) The largest ski school in the world, operating everywhere in France big enough to have a ski lift and high enough to be snow-sure. The tuition is first rate.

WALKING

Parcs Nationaux (<http://federation.ffvl.fr>, in French) First port of call if you are planning a visit to one of France's six national parks.

Parcs Naturels Régionaux (www.parcs-naturels-region

aux.tm.fr, in French) Has the low-down on activities, accommodation and events in France's 46 regional nature parks.

Grande Randonnée (www.grande-randonnee.fr, in French) A good source of information on France's long-distance footpaths. The website www.gr-infos.com also has details on specific walks in English.

Business Hours

French business hours are regulated by a maze of government regulations, including the 35-hour working week.

» The midday break is uncommon in Paris but, in general, gets longer the further south you go.

» French law requires that most businesses close on Sunday; exceptions include grocery stores, *boulangeries*, florists and businesses catering to the tourist trade.

» In some places shops close on Monday.

» Many service stations open 24 hours a day and stock basic groceries.

» Restaurants generally close one or two days of the week, chosen according to the owner's whim. In this

THE ART OF SLEEPING

A château, a country manor, five-star opulence at the foot of the Eiffel Tower – whether you want to live like a lord, sleep like a log or blow the budget, there's a room with your name on it.

Alistair Sawday's (www.sawdays.co.uk) Boutique retreats and *chambres d'hôte*, placing the accent on originality and authentic hospitality.

Hôtels de Charme (www.hotelsdecharme.com, in French) Abbeys, manors, châteaux – this is a mixed bag of (as the name says) charming hotels.

Grandes Étapes Françaises (www.grandesetapes.fr) Beautiful châteaux-hotels and four-star residences.

Logis de France (www.logis-de-france.fr) Small, often family-run hotels with charm and a warm welcome.

Relais & Châteaux (www.relaischateaux.com) Seductive selection of villas, châteaux and historic hotels.

Relais du Silence (www.relaisdusilence.com) Fall asleep to complete silence in a gorgeous château, spa-clad auberge, vineyard hotel...

Small Luxury Hotels of the World (www.slh.com) Super-luxurious boutique hotels, chalets and resorts.

STANDARD HOURS

We've only listed business hours where they differ from the following standards.

BUSINESS	OPENING HOURS
Bank	9 or 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri or Tue-Sat
Bar	7pm to 1am Mon-Sat
Café	7 or 8am-10 or 11pm Mon-Sat
Nightclub	10pm-3, 4 or 5am Thu-Sat
Post office	8.30am or 9am to 5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat
Restaurant	lunch noon-2.30 or 3pm, dinner 7-10 or 11pm
Shop	9 or 10am-noon & 2-6 or 7pm Mon-Sat
Supermarket	9am to 7pm or 8pm Mon-Sat

book, opening days/hours are only specified if the restaurant isn't open for both lunch and dinner daily.

» Most (but not all) national museums are closed on Tuesday, while most local museums are closed on Monday, though in summer some open daily. Many museums close at lunchtime.

» In this book we give high-season hours for sights and attractions; hours are generally reduced during low season.

- » 2L wine
- » 50ml perfume
- » 250ml eau de toilette
- » other goods up to the value of €175 (€90 for under 15s)

Higher limits apply if you are coming from Andorra; anything over these limits must be declared. For further details, see www.douane.gouv.fr (partly in English).

Discount Cards

Discount cards yield fantastic benefits and easily pay for themselves. As well as the card fee, you'll often need a passport-sized photo and some form of ID with proof of age (eg passport or birth certificate).

People over 60 or 65 are entitled to discounts on things like public transport, museum admission fees and theatres. For details of the SNCF's Carte Sénior, see p982.

Discount card options:

Camping Card International (CCI; www.campingcardinternational.com; €51 per family) Use as ID for checking into campsites;

includes 3rd-party liability insurance; usually yields 5-20% discount. Available at automobile associations, camping federations, camping grounds

European Youth Card (Euro<26 card; www.euro26.org; €14) Wide range of discounts for under-26s. Available online.

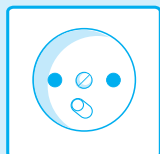
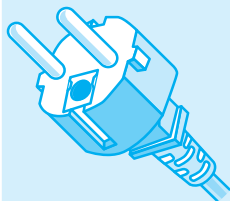
International Student Identity Card (ISIC; www.isic.org; €12) Discounts on travel, shopping, attractions and entertainment for full-time students. Available at ISIC points (see website).

International Teacher Identity Card (ITIC; www.isic.org; €12) Similar benefits to ISIC, for full-time teachers. Available at ISIC points (see website).

International Youth Travel Card (IYTC; www.isic.org; €12) Similar benefits to ISIC, for under-26s. Available at ISIC points (see website).

SnowBall Pass (www.snowballpass.com; €18) Discounts on lift passes, equipment hire, ski tuition, restaurants and accommodation in French Alps resorts. Available online.

Electricity



230V/50Hz

Customs Regulations

Goods brought in and out of countries within the EU incur no additional taxes provided duty has been paid somewhere within the EU and the goods are for personal consumption. Duty-free shopping is available only if you are leaving the EU.

Duty-free allowances (for adults) coming from non-EU countries (including the Channel Islands):

- » 200 cigarettes
- » 50 cigars
- » 1L spirits

European two-pin plugs are standard. France has 230V at 50Hz AC (you may need a transformer for 110V electrical appliances).

Embassies & Consulates

» All foreign embassies are in Paris.

» Many countries – including Canada, Japan, the UK, USA and most Euro-

pean countries – also have consulates in other major cities such as Bordeaux, Lyon, Nice, Marseille and Strasbourg.

» To find a consulate or an embassy not listed here, visit www.embassiesabroad.com or look up 'ambassade' in the super user-friendly **Pages Jaunes** (Yellow Pages; www.pagesjaunes.fr, in French).

Gay & Lesbian Travellers

Gay mayors (including Paris' very own Bertrand Delanoë), artists and film directors, camper-than-camp fashion designers – the rainbow flag flies high in France, a country that left its closet long before many of its European neighbours. *Laissez-faire* perfectly sums up France's liberal attitude towards

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES IN FRANCE

COUNTRY	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE	ADDRESS	NEAREST METRO
Australia	☎01 40 59 33 00	www.france.embassy.gov.au	4 rue Jean Rey	■ Bir Hakeim
Belgium	☎01 44 09 39 39	www.diplomatie.be/paris , in French & Flemish	9 rue de Tilsitt	■ Charles de Gaulle-Étoile
Canada	☎01 44 43 29 00	www.amb-canada.fr	35 av Montaigne	■ Franklin D Roosevelt
Germany	☎01 53 83 45 00	www.paris.diplo.de , in French & German	13 av Franklin D Roosevelt	■ Franklin D Roosevelt
Ireland	☎01 44 17 67 00	www.embassyofireland.fr	12 av Foch	■ Argentine
Italy	☎01 49 54 03 00	www.ambparigi.esteri.it , in French & Italian	51 rue de Varenne	■ Rue du Bac
Japan	☎01 48 88 62 00	www.amb-japon.fr , in French & Japanese	7 av Hoche	■ Courcelles
Netherlands	☎01 40 62 33 00	www.amb-pays-bas.fr , in French & Dutch	7 rue Eblé	■ St-François Xavier
New Zealand	☎01 45 01 43 43	www.nzembassy.com	7ter rue Léonard de Vinci	■ Victor Hugo
South Africa	☎01 53 59 23 23	www.afriquesud.net	59 quai d'Orsay	■ Invalides
Spain	☎01 44 43 18 00	www.amb-espagne.fr , in French & Spanish	22 av Marceau	■ Alma-Marceau
Switzerland	☎01 49 55 67 00	www.eda.admin.ch , in French	142 rue de Grenelle	■ Varenne
UK	☎01 44 51 31 00	http://ukinfrance.fco.gov.uk	35 rue du Faubourg St-Honoré	■ Concorde
USA	☎01 43 12 22 22	http://france.usembassy.gov	4 av Gabriel	■ Concorde

homosexuality and people's private lives in general; in part because of a long tradition of public tolerance towards unconventional lifestyles.

» Paris has been a thriving gay and lesbian centre since the late 1970s, and most major organisations are based there today.

» Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Montpellier, Toulouse and many other towns also have an active queer scene.

» Attitudes towards homosexuality tend to be more conservative in the countryside and villages.

» France's lesbian scene is less public than its gay male counterpart and is centred mainly on women's cafés and bars.

» Introduced in 1999, PACS (civil solidarity pacts) afford same-sex couples most of the rights, legal protections and responsibilities as their married counterparts.

» Gay Pride marches are held in major French cities from mid-May to early July.

Publications

Damron (www.damron.com) Publishes English-language travel guides, including the *Damron Women's Traveler* for lesbians and the *Damron Men's Travel Guide* for gays.

Lesbia French-language lesbian monthly.

Spartacus International Gay Guide (www.spartacusworld.com) Annual English-language travel guide for men.

Têtu (www.tetu.com, in French) A glossy monthly that bills itself as *le magazine des gais et des lesbiennes*. Has a France-wide directory of bars, clubs and hotels.

Websites

Cité Gay (www.citegay.fr, in French) Has the low-down on gay and lesbian events.

French Government Tourist Office (<http://us.franceguide.com/special-interests/gay-friendly>) Information about 'the gay-friendly destination par excellence'.

French Queer Resources Directory (www.france.qrd.org, in French) Gay and lesbian directory.

Gay France (www.gay-france.net, in French) Insider tips on gay life in France.

Gay Travel France (www.gaytravelfrance.com) Gay and lesbian hotels, apartment rentals and *chambres d'hôte* in France.

Gayscape (www.gayscape.com) Hundreds of links to gay- and lesbian-related sites.

Gayvox (www.gayvox.com/guide3, in French) Online travel guide to France, with listings by region.

Paris Gay (www.paris-gay.com) All you need to know about gay Paris.

Tasse de Thé (www.tassede.the.com, in French) A *webzine* *lesbien* with lots of useful links.

Health

France is a healthy place so your main risks are likely to be sunburn, foot blisters, insect bites and mild stomach problems from eating and drinking with too much gusto.

Before You Go

» Bring your medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers.

» A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names (French medicine names are often completely different to those in other countries), is also a good idea.

» Dental care in France is usually good; however, it is sensible to have a dental check-up before a long trip.

» No vaccinations are required to travel to France but the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all travellers be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of their destination.

EUROPEAN HEALTH INSURANCE CARD

Citizens of the EU, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway or Liechtenstein receive free or reduced-cost state-provided health-care cover with the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) for medical treatment that becomes necessary while in France. (The EHIC replaced the E111 in 2006.) Each family member will need a separate card. UK residents can get application forms from post offices, or download them from the Department of Health website (www.dh.gov.uk), which has comprehensive information about the card's coverage.

The EHIC does not cover private healthcare, so make sure that you are treated by a state healthcare provider (*conventionné*). You will need to pay directly and fill in a treatment form (*feuille de soins*); keep the form to claim any refunds. In general, you can claim back around 70% of the standard treatment cost.

Citizens of other countries need to check if there is a reciprocal arrangement for free medical care between their country and France.

Availability & Cost of Health Care

- » Visitors to France can get excellent health care from hospital (*hôpital*) emergency rooms/casualty wards (*salles des urgences*) and at a doctors' office (*cabinet médical*).
- » For minor illnesses, trained staff in pharmacies – in every village and town with a green-cross sign outside that flashes when open – give valuable advice, sell medications, can tell you when more specialised help is needed and will point you in the right direction.
- » You will need to pay upfront for any health care you receive, be it at a doctor's surgery, pharmacy or hospital, unless your insurance plan makes payments directly to providers.
- » The standard rate for a consultation with a GP/specialist is around €22 to €25.
- » Emergency contraception is available with a doctor's prescription. Condoms (*les préservatifs*) are readily available.

Insurance

- » Comprehensive travel insurance to cover theft, loss and medical problems is highly recommended.
- » Some policies specifically exclude dangerous activities such as scuba diving, motorcycling, skiing and even trekking: read the fine print.
- » Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home.
- » Find out in advance if your insurance plan will

make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures.

- » If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation.
- » Paying for your airline ticket with a credit card often provides limited travel accident insurance – ask your credit-card company what it is prepared to cover.
- » Worldwide travel insurance is available at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You can buy, extend and claim online anytime – even if you are already on the road.


Internet Access

- » Wireless (wi-fi) access points can now be found at major airports, in many (if not most) hotels and at most cafés.
- » Some tourist offices and numerous cafés and bars tout wi-fi hot spots that let laptop owners hook up for free.
- » To search for free wi-fi hot spots in France, visit www.hotspot-locations.co.uk or www.free-hotspot.com.
- » Internet cafés can be found in towns and cities countrywide; some are listed under Information in this book's On the Road chapters. Prices range from €2 to €6 per hour.
- » Public libraries (*bibliothèques or médiathèques*) often have free or inexpensive internet access, though hours are limited and you may have to fill in some forms.

» If you'll be accessing dial-up ISPs with your laptop, you will need a telephone-plug adaptor, available at large supermarkets.

Language Courses

- » www.studyabroadlinks.com can help you find specific courses and summer programs, while www.edufrance.fr/en has information about university study.
- » All manner of French language courses are available in Paris and provincial towns and cities; many also arrange accommodation.
- » Prices and courses vary greatly and the content can often be tailored to your specific needs (for a fee).
- » The government site www.diplomatie.gouv.fr (under 'Francophony') and www.europa-pages.com/france list language schools in France.
- » Some schools you might consider:

Alliance Française (☎01 42 84 90 00; www.alliancefr.org; 101 bd Raspail, 6e, Paris;  St-Placide) Venerable institution for the worldwide promotion of French language and civilisation, with intensive and extensive classes, including literature and business French.

Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Besançon (☎03 81 66 52 00; <http://cla.univ-fcomte.fr>; 6 rue Gabriel Plançon, Besançon) One of France's largest language schools, in a beautiful city, with a variety of language and culture classes.

Centre Méditerranéen d'Études Françaises (☎04 93 78 21 59; www.monte-carlo.mc/centremed; chemin des Oliviers, Cap d'Ail) Côte d'Azur school dating from 1952, with an open-air amphitheatre designed by Jean Cocteau overlooking the sparkling blue Med.

Eurocentre d'Amboise (☎02 47 23 10 60; www.

WHAT THE ICON MEANS

Throughout this guide, only accommodation providers that have an actual computer that guests can use to access the internet are flagged with a computer icon (🖨). The 📶 icon indicates anywhere with wi-fi access. Where this icon appears, assume the wi-fi is free unless otherwise specified.

eurocentres.com; 9 mail St-Thomas, Amboise) Small, well-organised school in the charming Loire Valley. Eurocentre has branches in La Rochelle and Paris.

Université de Provence (☎04 42 95 32 17; <http://sites.univ-provence.fr/wscee>; 29 av Robert Schumann, Aix-en-Provence) A hot choice in lovely Aix: semester-long language courses as well as shorter summer classes.

Legal Matters

Police

» French police have wide powers of search and seizure and can ask you to prove your identity at any time – whether or not there is 'probable cause'.

» Foreigners must be able to prove their legal status in France (eg passport, visa, residency permit) without delay.

» If the police stop you for any reason, be polite and remain calm. Verbally (and of course physically) abusing a police officer can lead to a hefty fine, and even imprisonment.

» You may refuse to sign a police statement, and have the right to ask for a copy.

» People who are arrested are considered innocent until proven guilty, but can be held in custody until trial.

» Because of the threat of terrorism, French police are very strict about security. Do not leave baggage unattended, especially at airports or train stations: suspicious objects may be summarily blown up.

Maps

Countrywide, road and city maps are available at Maisons de la Presse (large newsagencies), bookshops, airports, tourist offices and newspaper kiosks. Local organisations also produce

topoguides that supply details on trail conditions, flora, fauna and mountain shelters. Visit <http://fr.mapppy.com> (in French) for online maps and a journey planner.

Blay (www.blayfoldex.com, in French) Produces over 180 orange-jacketed street maps of French cities and towns.

FFRP (www.ffrandonnee.fr, in French) Publishes around 120 *topoguides* – map-equipped booklets about major trails (eg GRs) – in French.

Institut Géographique National (IGN; www.ign.fr) One of France's major map publishers, with regional fold-out maps as well as an all-France volume, *France – Routes, Autoroutes*. Has a great variety of *topoguides* and 1:50,000-scale maps that are ideal for hiking or walking. Its specialised *cyclocartes* (cycle maps) show dozens of suggested bicycle tours around France. The IGN also has themed maps showing wine regions, museums and so on.

Michelin (<http://boutique.cartesetguides.michelin.fr>, in French, www.viamichelin.com for online maps) Has excellent city maps of Paris and Lyon. Michelin's green-jacketed *Environs de*

LEGAL AGE

Age of majority 18

Buying alcohol 18

Driving 18

Minor under anti-pornography & prostitution laws under 18

Sexual consent 15 (for everyone)

Voting 18

Paris and Banlieue de Paris maps (€4.50) help with the confusing drive into and out of Paris. The yellow-orange 1:200,000-scale regional maps (€6.50) are perfect for cross-country driving. If you are covering more than a few regions, the national *Atlas Routier France* (€16) is better value.

Money

A guide to costs and exchange rates (at time of publication) can be found on p15.

ATMs

Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) – known as *distributeurs automatiques de billets* (DAB) or *points d'argent*

DRUGS & ALCOHOL

» French law does not distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' drugs.

» The penalty for any personal use of *stupéfiants* (including cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy and heroin) can be a one-year jail sentence and a €3750 fine but, depending on the circumstances, it might be anything from a stern word to a compulsory rehab program.

» Importing, possessing, selling or buying drugs can get you up to 10 years' prison and a fine of up to €500,000.

» Police have been known to search chartered coaches, cars and train passengers for drugs just because they're coming from Amsterdam.

» *l'vresse* (drunkenness) in public is punishable by a €150 fine.

in French – are the cheapest and most convenient way to get money. ATMs connected to international networks are situated in all cities and towns and usually offer an excellent exchange rate.

Cash

You always get a better exchange rate in-country but it is a good idea to arrive in France with enough euros to take a taxi to a hotel if you have to.

Credit & Debit Cards

» Credit and debit cards, accepted almost everywhere in France, are convenient, relatively secure and usually offer a better exchange rate than travellers cheques or cash exchanges.

» Credit cards issued in France have embedded chips – you have to type in a PIN to make a purchase.

» Visa, MasterCard and Amex can be used in shops and supermarkets and for train travel, car hire and motorway tolls, though some places (eg 24-hour petrol stations, some autoroute toll machines) only take French-style credit cards with chips and PINs.

» Don't assume that you can pay for a meal or a budget hotel with a credit card – enquire first.

» Cash advances are a supremely convenient way to stay stocked up with euros but getting cash with a credit card involves both fees (sometimes US\$10 or more) and interest – ask your credit-card issuer for details. Debit-card fees are usually much less.

LOST CARDS

For lost cards, these numbers operate 24 hours:

Amex (☎01 47 77 72 00)

Diners Club (☎08 10 31 41 59)

MasterCard (☎08 00 90 13 87)

Visa (Carte Bleue; ☎08 00 90 11 79)

Moneychangers

» Commercial banks usually charge a stiff €3 to €5 fee per foreign-currency transaction – if they even bother to offer exchange services any more.

» In Paris and major cities, *bureaux de change* (exchange bureaux) are faster and easier, open longer hours and often give better rates than banks.

» Some post-office branches exchange travellers cheques and banknotes in a variety of currencies but charge €5 commission for cash; most won't take US\$100 bills.

TIPPING

By law, restaurant and bar prices are *service compris* (include a 15% service charge), so there is no need to leave a *pourboire* (tip). If you were extremely satisfied with the service, however, you can – as many locals do – show your appreciation by leaving a small 'extra' tip for your waiter or waitress.

WHERE/WHO	CUSTOMARY TIP
bar	round to nearest euro
hotel cleaning staff	€1-1.50 per day
hotel porter	€1-1.50 per bag
restaurant	5-10%
taxi	10-15%
toilet attendant	€0.20-0.50
tour guide	€ 1-2 per person

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques, a relic of the 19th and 20th centuries, cannot be used to pay most French merchants directly and so have to be changed into euro banknotes at banks, exchange bureaux or post offices.

Public Holidays

The following *jours fériés* (public holidays) are observed in France:

New Year's Day (Jour de l'An) 1 January – parties in larger cities; fireworks are subdued by international standards

Easter Sunday & Monday (Pâques & lundi de Pâques) Late March/April

May Day (Fête du Travail) 1 May – traditional parades

Victoire 1945 8 May – commemorates the Allied victory in Europe that ended WWII

Ascension Thursday (Ascension) May – celebrated on the 40th day after Easter

Pentecost/Whit Sunday & Whit Monday (Pentecôte & lundi de Pentecôte) Mid-May to mid-June – celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Easter

Bastille Day/National Day (Fête Nationale) 14 July – the national holiday

Assumption Day (Assomption) 15 August

All Saints' Day (Toussaint) 1 November

Remembrance Day (L'onze novembre) 11 November – marks the WWI armistice

Christmas (Noël) 25 December

The following are *not* public holidays in France: Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras; the first day of Lent); Maundy (or Holy) Thursday and Good Friday, just before Easter; and Boxing Day (26 December).

Note: Good Friday and Boxing Day are public holidays in Alsace.

Safe Travel

France is generally a safe place in which to live and travel but crime has risen dramatically in the last few years. Although property

crime is a major problem, it is extremely unlikely that you will be physically assaulted while walking down the street. Always check your government's travel advisory warnings.

The France hunting season runs from September to February. If you see signs reading 'chasseurs' or 'chasse gardée' strung up or tacked to trees, think twice about wandering into the area. As well as millions of wild animals, 25 French hunters die each year after being shot by other hunters. Hunting is traditional and commonplace in all rural areas in France, especially the Vosges, the Sologne, the southwest and the Baie de Somme.

Natural Dangers

» There are powerful tides and strong undertows at many places along the Atlantic Coast, from the Spanish border north to Brittany and Normandy.

» Only swim in *zones de baignade surveillée* (beaches monitored by life guards).

» Be aware of tide times and the high-tide mark if walking or sleeping on a beach.

» Thunderstorms in the mountains and the hot southern plains can be extremely sudden and violent.

» Check the weather report before setting out on a long walk and be prepared for

sudden storms and temperature drops if you are heading into the high country of the Alps or Pyrenees.

» Avalanches pose a significant danger in the French Alps.

Theft

Pickpocketing and bag snatching (eg in dense crowds and public places) are prevalent in big cities, particularly Paris, Marseille and Nice. There's no need whatsoever to travel in fear. A few simple precautions will minimise your chances of being ripped off.

» On trains, keep bags as close to you as possible: luggage racks at the ends of carriage are easy prey for thieves; in sleeping compartments, lock the door carefully at night.

» Be especially vigilant for bag-snatchers at train stations, airports, fast-food outlets, outdoor cafés, beaches and on public transport.

» Break-ins to parked cars are a widespread problem. Never, ever leave anything valuable – or not valuable – inside your car, even in the boot (trunk).

» Aggressive theft from cars stopped at red lights is occasionally a problem, especially in Marseille and Nice. As a precaution, lock your car doors and roll up the windows.

STRIKES

France is the only European country in which public workers enjoy an unlimited right to strike, and they avail themselves of it with carefree abandon. Aggrieved truck drivers often block motorways and farmers agitating for more government support sometimes dump tonnes of produce on major arteries.

Getting caught in one of the 'social dialogues' that characterise labour relations in France can put a serious crimp in your travel plans. It is best to leave some wriggle room in your schedule, particularly around the departure times.

Telephone

Mobile Phones

» French mobile phone numbers begin with 06 or 07.

» France uses GSM 900/1800, which is compatible with the rest of Europe and Australia but not with the North American GSM 1900 or the totally different system in Japan (though some North Americans have tri-band phones that work here).

» Check with your service provider about roaming charges – dialling a mobile phone from a fixed-line phone or another mobile can be incredibly expensive.

» It may be cheaper to buy your own French SIM card – and locals you meet are much more likely to ring you if your number is French.

» If you already have a compatible phone, you can slip in a SIM card (€20 to €30) and rev it up with prepaid credit, though this is likely to run out fast as domestic prepaid calls cost about €0.50 per minute.

» Recharge cards are sold at most *tabacs* and newsagents.

» SIMs are available at the ubiquitous outlets run by France's three mobile phone companies, **Bouygues** (www.bouyguestelecom.fr), France Telecom's **Orange** (www.orange.com) and **SFR** (www.sfr.com, in French).

Phone Codes

Calling France from abroad

Dial your country's international access code, then 033 (France's country code), then the 10-digit local number *without* the initial zero.

Calling internationally from France

Dial 00 (the international access code), the *indicatif* (country code), the area code (without the initial zero if there is one)

and the local number. Some country codes are posted in public telephones.

Directory inquiries For France Telecom's service *des renseignements* (directory inquiries) dial ☎11 87 12. Not all operators speak English. For help in English with all France Telecom's services, see www.france-telecom.com or call ☎09 69 36 39 00.

Emergency numbers

Can be dialled from public phones without a phone-card. See p15 for important numbers.

Hotel calls Hotels, *gîtes*, hostels and *chambres d'hôte* are free to meter their calls as they like. The surcharge is usually around €0.30 per minute but can be higher.

International directory inquiries For numbers outside France, dial ☎11 87 00.

Phonecards

» For explanations in English and other languages on how to use a public telephone, push the button engraved with a two-flags icon.

» For both international and domestic calling, most public phones operate using either a credit card or two kinds of *télécartes* (phonecards): *cartes à puce* (cards with a magnetic chip) issued by France Télécom and sold at post offices for €8 or €15; and *cartes à code* (cards where you dial a free access number and then the card's scratch-off code), sold at *tabacs*, newsagents and post offices.

» Phonecards with codes offer *much* better international rates than France Télécom chip cards or Country Direct services (for which you are billed at home by your long-distance carrier).

» The shop you buy a phone-card from should be able to tell you which type is best for the country you want to call. Using phonecards from a home phone is much

cheaper than using them from public phones or mobile phones.

Tariffs

Additional charges may apply when calling from a hotel phone or mobile (cell) phone.

NUMBER	PER MINUTE
☎08 00	free
☎08 05	free
☎08 10	same as a local call
☎08 20	€0.12
☎08 21	€0.12
☎08 25	€0.15
☎08 26	€0.15
☎08 92	€0.34
☎11 87 12 (directory inquiries)	€1 per call, then €0.23 per minute
☎11 87 00 (international directory inquiries)	€2-3

Time

France uses the 24-hour clock and is on Central European Time, which is one hour ahead of GMT/UTC. During daylight-saving time, which runs from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October, France is two hours ahead of GMT/UTC.

The following times do not take daylight saving into account.

CITY	NOON IN PARIS
Auckland	11pm
Berlin	noon
Cape Town	noon
London	11am
New York	6am
San Francisco	3am
Sydney	9pm
Tokyo	8pm

Toilets

Public toilets, signposted WC or *toilettes*, are not always plentiful in France, especially outside of the big cities.

Love them (as a sci-fi geek) or loathe them (as a claustrophobe), France's 24-hour self-cleaning toilets are here to stay. Outside of Paris – where they are free – these mechanical WCs cost around €0.50 a go. Don't even think about nipping in after someone else to avoid paying unless you fancy a *douche* (shower) with disinfectant. There is no time for dawdling either: you have precisely 15 minutes before being (*ooh-la-la!*) exposed to passers-by. Green means *libre* (vacant) and red means *occupé* (occupied).

Some older establishments and motorway stops still have the hole-in-the-floor *toilettes à la turque* (squat toilets). Provided you hover, these are actually very hygienic, but take care not to get soaked by the flush.

Keep some loose change handy for tipping toilet attendants, who keep a hawk-like eye on many of France's public toilets.

The French are more blasé about unisex toilets than elsewhere, so save your blushes when tiptoeing past the urinals to reach the ladies' loo.

Tourist Information

Almost every city, town, village and hamlet has an *office de tourisme* (a tourist office run by some unit of local government) or *syndicat d'initiative* (a tourist office run by an organisation of local merchants). Both are excellent resources and can supply you with local maps as well as details on accommodation, restaurants and activities. If you have a special interest such as walking,

ALSACE
67 Bas-Rhin
68 Haut-Rhin

AQUITAINE
24 Dordogne
33 Gironde
40 Landes
47 Lot-et-Garonne
64 Pyrénées-Atlantiques

AUVERGNE
03 Allier
15 Cantal
43 Haute-Loire
63 Puy-de-Dôme

BASSE-NORMANDIE
14 Calvados
50 Manche
61 Orne

BOURGOGNE
21 Côte-d'Or
58 Nièvre
71 Saône-et-Loire
89 Yonne

BRETAGNE
22 Côte-d'Armor
29 Finistère
35 Ille-et-Vilaine
56 Morbihan

CENTRE
18 Cher
28 Eure-et-Loir
36 Indre
37 Indre-et-Loire
45 Loiret
41 Loir-et-Cher

CHAMPAGNE-ARDENNE
08 Ardennes
10 Aube
51 Marne
52 Haute-Marne

CORSE
2A Corse-du-Sud
2B Haute-Corse

FRANCHE-COMTÉ
25 Doubs
39 Jura
70 Haute-Saône
90 Territoire de Belfort

HAUTE-NORMANDIE
27 Eure
76 Seine-Maritime

ÎLE-DE-FRANCE
91 Essonne
92 Haut-de-Seine
75 Paris
78 Seine-et-Marne
93 Seine-St-Denis
94 Val-de-Marne
95 Val-d'Oise
77 Yvelines

LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON
11 Aude
30 Gard
34 Hérault
48 Lozère
66 Pyrénées-Orientales

LIMOUSIN
19 Corrèze
23 Creuse
87 Haute-Vienne

LORRAINE
54 Meurthe-et-Moselle
55 Meuse
57 Moselle
88 Vosges

MIDI-PYRÉNÉES
09 Ariège
12 Aveyron
32 Gers
31 Haute-Garonne
65 Hautes-Pyrénées

NORD-PAS-DE-CALAIS
59 Nord
62 Pas-de-Calais

PAYS DE LA LOIRE
44 Loire-Atlantique
49 Maine-et-Loire
53 Mayenne
72 Sarthe
85 Vendée

PICARDIE
02 Aisne
60 Oise
80 Somme

POITOU-CHARENTES
16 Charente
17 Charente-Maritime
79 Deux-Sèvres
86 Vienne

PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR
04 Alpes-de-Haute-Provence
06 Alpes-Maritimes
13 Bouches-du-Rhône
05 Hautes-Alpes
83 Var
84 Vaucluse

RHÔNE-ALPES
01 Ain
07 Ardèche
26 Drôme
74 Haute-Savoie
38 Isère
42 Loire
69 Rhône
73 Savoie

International Boundary
Région Boundary
Département Boundary



cycling, architecture or wine sampling, ask about it.

In this book tourist office details appear under Information at the end of each city, town or area listing.

» Many tourist offices make local hotel and B&B reservations, sometimes for a nominal fee. Some have limited currency-exchange services.

» *Comités régionaux de tourisme* (CRTs; regional tourist boards), their *départementales* analogues (CDTs), and their websites are a superb source of information and hyperlinks.

» French government tourist offices (usually called *Maisons de la France*) provide every imaginable sort of tourist information on France.

» Useful websites:

French Government Tourist Office (www.franceguide.com) The low-down on sights, activities, transport and special interest holidays in all of France's regions. Brochures can be downloaded online. There are links to country-specific websites.

Réseau National des Destinations Départementales (www.fncdt.net, in French) Find CRT (regional

tourist board) websites here.

Travellers with Disabilities

While France presents evident challenges for *handicapés* (people with disabilities) – namely cobblestone, café-lined streets that are a nightmare to navigate in a wheelchair, a lack of kerb ramps, older public facilities and many budget hotels without lifts – don't let that stop you from visiting. With a little careful planning, you can enjoy a hassle-free accessible stay.

The Paris metro, most of it built decades ago, is hopeless, but you will be pleased to know that taxi drivers are obliged by law to assist and accept passengers with disabilities (and their guide dogs, where relevant). Choose central accommodation to avoid spending a small fortune on taxi fares.

Whether you are looking for wheelchair-friendly accommodation, sights, attractions or restaurants, these associations and agencies should be able to point you in the right direction:

Accès Plus Transilien (☎08 10 64 64 64; [\[infomobi.com\]\(http://infomobi.com\), in French\) Has comprehensive information on accessible travel in Paris.](http://www.</p>
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Access Travel (☎in UK 01942-888 844; www.access-travel.co.uk) Specialised UK-based agency for accessible travel.

Association des Paralysés de France (APF; www.apf.asso.fr, in French) National organisation for people with disabilities, with offices in every region in France.

Centre du Service Accès Plus (☎08 90 64 06 50; www.accessibilite.sncf.fr, in French) Can advise on station accessibility and arrange a *fauteuil roulant* (wheelchair) or help getting on or off a train.

Mobile en Ville (www.mobile-en-ville.asso.fr, in French) Works to make Paris wheelchair accessible and publishes *Paris Comme sur les Roulettes*, which showcases 20 tours of the city.

Paris Convention & Visitors Bureau (<http://en.parisinfo.com>) Has information and brochures on accessible Paris.

Tourisme et Handicaps (www.tourisme-handicaps.org, in French) Issues the 'Tourisme et Handicap' label to tourist sites, restaurants and hotels that comply with

ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

» SNCF's French-language booklet *Guide des Voyageurs Handicapés et à Mobilité Réduite*, available at train stations, gives details of rail access for people with disabilities.

» Michelin's *Guide Rouge* uses icons to indicate hotels with lifts (elevators) and facilities that make them at least partly accessible to people with disabilities.

» *Handitourisme* (€16), a national guide in French, is published by **Petit Futé** (www.petitfute.fr, in French).

» www.jaccede.com (in French) has loads of information and reviews.

» *Access in Paris* is a useful guide published by **Access Project** (www.accessproject-phsp.org) and can be downloaded as PDF files.

» **Gîtes de France** (www.gites-de-france.com) can provide details of accessible *gîtes ruraux* and *chambres d'hôte* (search the website with the term 'disabled access').

» **France Guide** (www.franceguide.com) has a dedicated 'special needs' area with lots of info for travellers with disabilities.

strict accessibility and usability standards. Different symbols indicate the sort of access afforded to people with physical, mental, hearing and/or visual disabilities.

Tourism for All (📍 in UK 0845-124 9971; www.tourismforall.info) A UK-based group that provides tips and information for travellers with disabilities.

Visas

For up-to-date details on visa requirements, see the website of the **French Foreign Affairs Ministry** (www.diplomatie.gouv.fr) and click 'Going to France'. Tourist visas *cannot* be extended except in emergencies (such as medical problems). When your visa expires you'll need to leave and reapply from outside France.

Visa Requirements

» EU nationals and citizens of Iceland, Norway and Switzerland need only a passport or a national identity card in order to enter France and stay in the country, even for stays of over 90 days. However, citizens of new EU member states may be subject to various limitations on living and working in France.

» Citizens of Australia, the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and many Latin American countries do not need visas to visit France as tourists for up to 90 days. For long stays of over 90 days, contact your nearest French embassy or consulate and begin your application well in advance as it can take months.

» Other people wishing to come to France as tourists have to apply for a **Schengen Visa**, named after the agreements that abolished passport controls between 15 European countries. It allows unlimited travel throughout the entire zone

for a 90-day period. Apply to the consulate of the country you are entering first, or your main destination. Among other things, you will need travel and repatriation insurance and be able to show that you have sufficient funds to support yourself.

» Tourist visas cannot be changed into student visas after arrival. However, short-term visas are available for students sitting university-entrance exams in France.

Carte de Séjour

» EU passport-holders and citizens of Switzerland, Iceland and Norway do not need a *carte de séjour* (residence permit) to reside or work in France.

» Nationals of other countries with long-stay visas must contact the local *mairie* (city hall) or *préfecture* (prefecture) to apply for a *carte de séjour*. Usually, you are required to do so within eight days of arrival in France. Make sure you have all the necessary documents before you arrive.

» Students of all nationalities studying in Paris must apply for a *carte de séjour* either through their university (if the option exists) or at the Centre des Étudiants Étrangers in Paris; see the website of Paris' **Préfecture de Police** (www.prefecture-police-paris.interieur.gouv.fr, in French) for more information.

Working Holiday Visa

Citizens of Australia, Canada, Japan and New Zealand aged between 18 and 30 are eligible for a 12-month, multiple-entry Working Holiday Visa (*Permis Vacances Travail*), allowing combined tourism and employment in France.

» Apply to the embassy or consulate in your home country. Do this early as there are annual quotas.

» You must be applying for a Working Holiday Visa for France for the first time.

» You will need comprehensive travel insurance for the duration of your stay.

» You must meet all health and character requirements.

» You will need a return plane ticket and proof of sufficient funds (usually around (€2100) to get you through the start of your stay.

» Once you have arrived in France and have found a job, you must apply for an *autorisation provisoire de travail* (temporary work permit), which will only be valid for the duration of the employment offered. The permit can be renewed under the same conditions up to the limit of the authorised length of stay.

» You can also study or do training programs but the visa cannot be extended, nor can it turned into a student visa.

» After one year you *must* go home.

» Once in France, the **Centre d'Information et Documentation Jeunesse** (CIDJ; www.cidj.com) can help with information.

Volunteering

Websites like **www.volunteerabroad.com** and **www.transitionsabroad.com** throw up a colourful selection of volunteering opportunities in France: helping out on a family farm in the Alps, restoring an historic monument in Provence or participating in a summertime archaeological excavation are but some of the golden opportunities awaiting those keen to volunteer their skills and services.

Interesting volunteer organisations:

Club du Vieux Manoir (<http://clubduvieuxmanoir.asso.fr>, in French) Restore a medieval fortress, an abbey or a historic château at a summer work camp.

Conservation Corps (www.geovisions.org) Volunteer 15 hours a week to teach a French family English in exchange for room and board.

Rempart (www.rempart.com) Brings together 170 organisations countrywide committed to preserving France's religious, military, civil, industrial and natural heritage.

Volunteers for Peace (www.vfp.org) USA-based nonprofit organisation. Can link you up with a voluntary service project dealing with social work, the environment, education or the arts.

World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF; www.woof.org & www.woof.fr) Work on a small farm or other organic venture (harvesting chestnuts, renovating an abandoned olive farm near Nice etc).

Work

» EU nationals have an automatic right to work in France.

» Most others will need a hard-to-get work permit, issued at the request of your employer, who will have to show that no one in France – or the entire European Economic Area – can do your job.

» Exceptions may be made for artists, computer engineers and translation specialists.

» Working 'in the black' (that is, without documents) is difficult and risky for non-EU nationals.

» The only instance in which the government might turn a blind eye to workers without documents is during fruit harvests (mid-May to November) and the *vendange* (grape harvest; mid-September to mid- or late October). Though, of course, undocumented workers harvest at their own risk.

» Au-pair work is also very popular and can be done legally even by non-EU citizens. To apply, contact a placement agency at least three months in advance.

Finding Work

EU nationals with the right to work in France can find seasonal and casual work in restaurants, bars and hotels (particularly in the Alps during the winter skiing season). Teaching English is another option, either for a company or through private lessons. Useful websites for finding your dream job include the following:

AJF (www.afj-aupair.org/apfrance.htm) A reputable source for finding au-pair work in France.

Centre d'Information et de Documentation Jeunesse (CIDJ; www.cidj.com, in French) Provides young people with information on jobs (including seasonal summer jobs), housing, education and more. It has offices all over France.

French Entrée (www.frenchentree.com) Handy tips on working in France, from preparing a CV to finding a job.

FUSAC (France USA Contacts; www.fusac.fr) Paris-based mag. Advertises jobs for English speakers, including au-pair work, babysitting and language teaching.

Job d'Été (www.jobdete.com, in French) Search for France's hottest summer jobs by region.

Mountain Pub (www.mountainpub.com) Worth checking for bar and hotel work in the French Alps.

Natives (www.natives.co.uk) *Seasonaire* central for winter and summer seasonal work.

Pôle Emploi (www.pole-emploi.fr, in French) France's national employment service has offices throughout France; the website has job listings.

Season Workers (www.seasonworkers.com) Search for summer and winter jobs.

Transport

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at loneplanet.com/bookings.

Entering the Country

Entering France from other parts of the EU is usually a breeze – no border checkpoints and no customs – thanks to the Schengen agreement, signed by all of France's neighbours except the UK, the Channel Islands and Andorra. For these three entities, old-fashioned document and customs checks are still the norm, at least when exiting France (when entering France in the case of Andorra).

Air

Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport is the second-busiest in Europe, after London's Heathrow.

Smaller provincial airports with international flights, mainly to/from the UK, continental Europe and North Africa, include Angoulême, Paris-Beauvais (Beauvais-

Tillé), Bergerac, Béziers, Biarritz, Brest, Brive-Vallée de la Dordogne, Caen, Carcassonne, Deauville, Dinard, Grenoble, La Rochelle, Le Touquet, Limoges, Montpellier, Nîmes, Pau, Perpignan, Poitiers, Rennes, Rodez, St-Étienne, Toulon and Tours. Relevant local airports, including those on Corsica, are listed in destination chapters.

International Airports

Charles de Gaulle (Roissy) (www.aeroportsdeparis.fr)

Orly (www.aeroportsdeparis.fr)

Bordeaux (www.bordeaux.aeroport.fr)

Lille (www.lille.aeroport.fr)

Lyon (www.lyon.aeroport.fr)

Marseille (www.mrsairport.com)

Mulhouse-Basel-Freiburg (EuroAirport) (www.euroairport.com, www.fly-euroairport.com)

Nantes (www.nantes.aeroport.fr)

Nice (www.nice.aeroport.fr)

Strasbourg (www.strasbourg.aeroport.fr)

Toulouse (www.toulouse.aeroport.fr)

Land

Bicycle

Getting a bicycle to France is a breeze.

On **Eurotunnel shuttle trains** (for bicycle reservations Mon-Fri 01303-282 201 in the UK; www.eurotunnel.com) through the Channel Tunnel, the fee for a bicycle, including its rider, is UK£16 one-way.

A bike that's been dismantled so it's the size of a suitcase can be carried on board a **Eurostar train** (reservations in UK 0844-822 5822; www.eurostar.com) from London or Brussels just like any other luggage. Otherwise, there's a UK£20 charge and you'll need advance reservations. For links relevant to taking your bike on other international trains to France, see www.railpassenger.info.

On ferries, foot passengers – where allowed – can usually (but not always) bring along a bicycle for no charge.

European Bike Express (in UK 01430-422 111; www.bike-express.co.uk) transports cyclists and their bikes from the UK to places around France.

Bus

Eurolines (08 92 89 90 91; www.eurolines.eu), a grouping of 32 long-haul coach operators (including the UK's National Express), links France with cities all across Europe and in Morocco and Russia. Discounts are available to people under 26 and over 60. It's a good idea to make advance reservations, especially in July and August.

The standard Paris–London fare is €46 (€57 including high-season supplements) but the trip – including a Channel crossing either by ferry or the Channel – can cost as little €15 if you book 45 days ahead.

A right-hand-drive vehicle brought to France from the UK or Ireland must have deflectors affixed to the headlights to avoid dazzling oncoming traffic. In the UK, information on driving in France is available from the **RAC** (www.rac.co.uk/driving-abroad/france) and the **AA** (www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/overseas).

Police searches are not uncommon for vehicles entering France, particularly from Spain and Belgium (via which drugs from Morocco or the Netherlands can enter France). See p977 for details about driving in France.

A foreign motor vehicle entering France must display a sticker or licence plate identifying its country of registration.

EUROTUNNEL

The Channel Tunnel (Chunnel), inaugurated in 1994, is the first dry-land link between England and France since the last ice age.

High-speed **Eurotunnel shuttle trains** (🚆) in UK 08443-35 35 35, in France 08 10 63 03 04; www.eurotunnel.com) whisk bicycles, motorcycles, cars and coaches from Folkestone through the Channel Tunnel to Coquelles, 5km southwest of Calais, in air-conditioned and soundproofed comfort in just 35 minutes. Shuttles run 24 hours a day, every day of the year, with up to three departures an hour during peak periods. LPG and CNG tanks are not permitted, so gas-powered cars and many campers and caravans have to travel by ferry.

Eurotunnel sets its fares the way budget airlines do: the further in advance you book and the lower the demand for a particular crossing, the less you pay; same-day fares can cost a small fortune. Standard fares for a car, including up to nine passengers, start at UK£53.

SAMPLE TRAIN FARES

ROUTE	FULL FARE (€)	DURATION (HR)
Amsterdam-Paris	79	3¼
Barcelona-Montpellier	57	4½
Berlin-Paris	238	8
Brussels-Paris	44-64	1½
Frankfurt-Paris	106	4
Geneva-Lyon	25	2
Geneva-Marseille	65	3½
Vienna-Strasbourg	149	9

Train

Rail services – including a dwindling number of overnight services to/from Spain, Italy and Germany – link France with virtually every country in Europe. For details on train travel within France, see p980.

You can book tickets and get train information from **Rail Europe** (www.raileurope.com). In France ticketing is handled by **SNCF** (🚆) in France 36 35, from abroad +33-8 92 35 35 35; www.sncf.com); telephone and internet bookings are possible but they won't post tickets outside France.

For details on Europe's 200,000km rail network, see www.railpassenger.info, set up by a grouping of European rail companies. Information on 'seamless high-speed rail travel' between France and the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria is available from www.railteam.co.uk and www.tgv-europe.com.

Certain rail services between France and its continental neighbours are marketed under a number of peculiar brand names:

Artésia (www.artesia.eu) Serves Italian cities such as Milan and, overnight, Venice, Florence and Rome.

Elipsos (www.elipsos.com) Luxurious 'train-hotel' services to Spain.

TGV Lyria (www.tgv-lyria.fr) To Switzerland.

Thalys (www.thalys.com) Links Paris Gare du Nord with destinations such as Bruxelles-Midi (82 minutes), Amsterdam CS (three hours and 20 minutes) and Cologne's Hauptbahnhof (3¼ hours).

A very useful train-travel resource is the information-packed website **The Man in Seat 61** (www.seat61.com).

EURAIL PASS

In general, rail passes are worthwhile only if you plan to really clock up the kilometres.

Available only to people who don't live in Europe, the **Eurail Pass** (www.eurail.com) is valid in up to 21 countries, including France. People 25 and under get the best deals. Other benefits include a 'passholder' discount on the London-Paris Eurostar (one-way/return €89/150 or UK£57/100) and 30% off the adult pedestrian fare for Irish Ferries crossings between Ireland and France (make sure you book ahead). Passes must be validated at a train-station ticket window before you begin your first journey.

EUROSTAR

The highly civilised **Eurostar** (📞 in UK 08432-186 186, in France 08 92 35 35 39; www.eurostar.com) whisks you from London to Paris in an incredible 2¼ hours, with easy onward connections to destinations all over France.

Except late at night, trains link London (St Pancras International) with Paris (Gare du Nord; hourly), Calais (Calais-Fréthun; one hour, three daily), Lille (Gare Lille-Europe; 1½ hours, eight daily) and Disneyland Resort Paris (2½ hours, one direct daily), with less frequent services departing from Ebbsfleet and Ashford, both in Kent. Ski trains connect England with the French Alps on weekends from mid-December to mid-April.

Eurostar offers a bewildering array of fares. A fully flexible 2nd-class one-way/

return ticket from London to Paris costs a whopping UK£179/309 (€245/435), but super-discount returns go for as little as UK£69.

You'll get the best deals if you buy a return ticket, stay over a Saturday night, book well (ie up to 120 days) in advance – the cheapest fares sell out early – and don't mind nonexchangeability and nonrefundability. Discount fares are available if you're under 26 or over 60 on your departure date. Credit-card purchases (but not debit) incur a fee of UK£3. Student travel agencies may offer youth fares not available directly from Eurostar.

Sea

For a map of ferry routes across the English Channel and the Mediterranean, see

the Trains & Ferries map, p976.

Some ferry companies have started setting fares the way budget airlines do: the longer in advance you book and the lower the demand for a particular sailing, the less you pay, with the cheapest tickets costing just a third of the priciest ones. Last-minute tickets are the most expensive. Seasonal demand is a crucial factor (Christmas, Easter, UK and French school holidays, July and August are especially busy), as is the time of day (an early evening ferry can cost much more than one at 4am). People under 25 and over 60 may qualify for discounts.

To get the best fares, you might want to check out the booking service offered by **Ferry Savers** (📞 in UK 0844-371 8021; www.ferrysavers.com); booking by phone incurs a fee.

INTERNATIONAL FERRY COMPANIES

COMPANY	CONNECTION	WEBSITE
Brittany Ferries	England-Normandy, England-Brittany, Ireland-Brittany	www.brittany-ferries.co.uk ; www.brittany-ferries.ie
Celtic Link Ferries	Ireland-Normandy	www.celticlinkferries.com
Comanav & Comarit	Morocco-France	www.aferry.to/comanav.htm ; www.aferry.to/comarit.htm
Condor Ferries	England-Normandy, England-Brittany, Channel Islands-Brittany	www.condorferries.com
CTN	Tunisia-France	www.ctn.com.tn
Irish Ferries	Ireland-Normandy, Ireland-Brittany	www.irishferries.ie ; www.shamrock-irlande.com , in French
LD Lines	England-Channel Ports, England-Normandy	www.ldlines.co.uk
Manche Îles Express	Channel Islands-Normandy	www.manche-iles-express.com
Norfolk Line	England-Channel Ports	www.norfolkline.com
P&O Ferries	England-Channel Ports	www.poferries.com
SeaFrance	England-Channel Ports	www.seafrance.com
SNCM	Algeria-France, Sardinia-France, Tunisia-France	www.sncm.fr
Transmanche Ferries	England-Normandy	www.transmancheferries.com

Foot passengers are not allowed on any Dover–Boulogne, Dover–Dunkirk or Dover–Calais car ferries except for daytime (and, from Calais to Dover, evening) crossings run by P&O Ferries. On ferries that do allow foot passengers, taking a bicycle is often (but not always) free.

Several ferry companies ply the waters between Corsica and Italy. For details, see p870.

GETTING AROUND

Driving is the simplest way to get around France but a car is a liability in traffic-plagued, parking-starved city centres, and those petrol bills and *autoroute* (dual carriage-way/divided highway) tolls can really add up.

France is famous for its truly excellent public-transport network, which serves every corner of the land except some rural areas. In addition to its environmental benefits, travelling by train, metro, tram and bus lets you experience France the way many ordinary French people do, taking in the sights, encountering the unexpected, and meeting locals at a pace set by the rhythm of day-to-day life.

The state-owned Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (SNCF) takes care of almost all land transport between *départements* (administrative divisions of

France). Transport within *départements* is handled by a combination of short-haul trains, SNCF buses and local bus companies that are either government owned or government contracted.

Domestic air travel has been partly deregulated but smaller carriers still struggle.

Air

France's vaunted high-speed train network has made rail travel between some cities (eg from Paris to Lyon and Marseille) faster and easier than flying.

Airlines in France

Air France (☎36 54; www.airfrance.com) and its subsidiaries **Brit Air** (☎36 54; www.britair.fr) and **Régional** (☎36 54; www.regional.com) continue to control the lion's share of France's long-protected domestic airline industry.

Significant discounts are available to:

- » people aged 12 to 24 (26 and under for students)
- » people over 60
- » couples who are married or can prove they live together
- » parents or grandparents travelling with at least one child or grandchild aged 12 to 25 (27 in the case of students).

Good deals can also be had if:

- » you buy your ticket well in advance (at least 42 days ahead for the very best deals)
- » stay over a Saturday night
- » don't mind tickets that can't be changed or reimbursed.

The Air France website posts special last-minute offers.

Budget carriers offering flights within France include **EasyJet** (www.easyjet.com), **Airlinair** (www.airlinair.com), **Twin Jet** (www.twinjet.net) and **CCM** (www.aircorsica.com).

For more information on flights to Corsica, see p869.

Bicycle

France is generally a great place to cycle. Not only is much of the countryside drop-dead gorgeous, but the country has a growing number of urban and rural *pistes cyclables* (bike paths and lanes; see www.voiesvertes.com, in French) and an extensive network of secondary and tertiary roads with relatively light traffic. One pitfall: back roads rarely have proper shoulders so consulting local cyclists (eg at bike shops) when choosing your route, and wearing a fluorescent reflective vest, is highly recommended.

French law requires that bicycles must have two functioning brakes, a bell, a red reflector on the back and yellow reflectors on the pedals. After sunset and when vis-

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Every form of transport that relies on carbon-based fuel generates CO₂, the main cause of human-induced climate change. Modern travel is dependent on aeroplanes, which might use less fuel per kilometre per person than most cars but travel much greater distances. The altitude at which aircraft emit gases (including CO₂) and particles also contributes to their climate change impact. Many websites offer 'carbon calculators' that allow people to estimate the carbon emissions generated by their journey and, for those who wish to do so, to offset the impact of the greenhouse gases emitted with contributions to portfolios of climate-friendly initiatives throughout the world. Lonely Planet offsets the carbon footprint of all staff and author travel.

ibility is poor, cyclists must turn on a white headlamp and a red tail lamp. When being overtaken by a vehicle, cyclists are required to ride in single file. Towing children in a bike trailer is permitted.

Never leave your bicycle locked up outside overnight if you want to see it – or at least most of its parts – again. Some hotels offer enclosed bicycle parking.

See p957 for cycling organisations.

Transportation

The SNCF does its best to make travelling with a bicycle easy and even has a special website for cyclists, www.velo.sncf.com (in French).

Bicycles (not disassembled) can be taken along on virtually all intraregional TER trains and most long-distance intercity trains, subject to space availability. There's no charge on TER and Corail Intercité trains but TGV, TéoZ and Lunéa trains require a €10 reservation fee that must be made when you purchase your passenger ticket. Bike reservations can be made by phone (☎36 35) or at an SNCF ticket office but not via the internet.

Bicycles that have been partly disassembled and put in a box (*housse*), with maximum dimensions of 120cm by 90cm, can be taken along for no charge in the baggage compartments of TGV, TéoZ, Lunéa and Corail Intercité trains.

In the Paris area, bicycles are allowed aboard Transilien and RER trains except Monday to Friday in the following times:

- » 6.30am to 9am for trains heading into Paris
- » 4.30pm to 7pm for trains travelling out of Paris
- » 6am to 9am and 4.30pm to 7pm on RER lines A and B

With precious few exceptions, bicycles are not allowed on metros, trams and local, intra-département

and SNCF buses (the latter replace trains on some runs).

Bike Rental

Most French cities and towns have at least one bike shop or municipal sports complex that rents out *vélos tout terrains* (mountain bikes; generally €10 to €20 a day), popularly known as VTTs, as well as more road-oriented *vélos tout chemin* (VTCs), or cheaper city bikes. You usually have to leave ID and/or a deposit (often a credit-card slip) that you forfeit if the bike is damaged or stolen. Some cities, such as Strasbourg and La Rochelle, have inexpensive rental agencies run by the municipality. For details on rental options, see Getting Around under city and town listings throughout this book.

A growing number of cities – most famously Paris and Lyon, but also Aix-en-Provence, Amiens, Besançon, Caen, Dijon, La Rochelle, Marseille, Montpellier, Mulhouse, Nancy, Nantes, Orléans, Perpignan, Rennes, Rouen and Toulouse – have automatic bike-rental systems, intended to encourage cycling as a form of urban transport, with computerised pick-up and drop-off sites all over town. In general, you have to sign up either short term or long term, providing credit-card details, and can then use the bikes for no charge for the first half-hour; after that, hourly charges rise quickly. For details on Paris' Vélib' system, see p131.

If you'll be doing lots of cycling but don't want to bring your bike from home, it may be worthwhile to buy a VTT (prices start at around €250) and resell it at the end of your trip for around two-thirds of its purchase price, something that's possible at certain bike shops.

Boat

For information on boat services along France's coasts

and to offshore islands, see individual town and city sections.

Canal Boating

Transportation and tranquility are usually mutually exclusive – but not if you rent a houseboat and cruise along France's canals and navigable rivers, stopping at whim to pick up supplies, dine at a village restaurant or check out a local château by bicycle. Changes in altitude are taken care of by a system of *écluses* (locks).

Boats generally accommodate from two to 12 passengers and are fully outfitted with bedding and cooking facilities. Anyone over 18 can pilot a riverboat but first-time skippers are given a short instruction session so they qualify for a *carte de plaisance* (a temporary cruising permit). The speed limit is 6km/h on canals and 8km/h on rivers.

Prices start at around €450 a week for a small boat and can top €3000 a week for a large, luxurious craft. Except in July and August, you can often rent over a weekend (Friday to Monday: from €280) or from Monday to Friday.

Advance reservations are essential for holiday periods, over long weekends and in July and August, especially for larger boats.

Online rental agencies: **Canal Boat Holidays** (www.canalboatoholidays.com) **H2olidays** (Barging in France; www.barginginfrance.com) **Worldwide River Cruise** (www.worldwide-river-cruise.com)

See also destination chapters for more information on canal boating in individual regions.

Bus

Buses are widely used for short-distance travel within *départements*, especially in



rural areas with relatively few train lines (eg Brittany and Normandy). Unfortunately, services in some regions are infrequent and slow, in part because they were designed to get children to

their schools in the towns rather than transport visitors around the countryside.

Over the years, certain uneconomical train lines have been replaced by SNCF buses, which, unlike regional

buses, are free if you've got a rail pass.

Eurolines may soon be permitted to transport passengers between cities within France.

Car & Motorcycle

Having your own wheels gives you exceptional freedom and makes it easy to visit more remote parts of France. Unfortunately driving can be expensive. For example, by autoroute, the 925km drive from Paris to Nice (nine hours of driving) in a small car costs about €70 for petrol and €69 for tolls – by comparison, a one-way, 2nd-class TGV ticket for the 5½-hour Paris to Nice run costs €41 to €165 per person. Also, in the cities, traffic and finding a place to park are frequently a major headache. During holiday periods and over long weekends, roads throughout France also get backed up with traffic jams (*bouchons*).

Motorcyclists will find France great for touring, with winding roads of good quality and lots of stunning scenery. Just make sure your wet-weather gear is up to scratch.

France (along with Belgium) has the densest highway network in Europe. There are four types of inter-city roads:

Autoroutes (highway names beginning with A) Multilane divided highways, usually (except near Calais and Lille) with tolls (*péages*). Generously outfitted with rest stops.

Routes Nationales (N, RN) National highways. Some sections have divider strips.

Routes Départementales (D) Local highways and roads.

Routes Communales (C, V) Minor rural roads.

Information on autoroute tolls, rest areas, traffic and weather is available from www.autoroutes.fr. Bison Futé (www.bison-fute.equipement.gouv.fr) is also a good source of information

about traffic conditions. The websites www.viamichelin.com and www.mappy.fr (in French) plot itineraries between your departure and arrival points.

Note that theft from cars is a major problem in France, especially in the south – see p965.

Car Hire

To hire a car in France, you'll generally need to be over 21 years old, have had a driving licence for at least a year, and have an international credit card. Drivers under 25 usually have to pay a surcharge (*frais jeune conducteur*) of €25 to €35 per day.

Car-hire companies provide mandatory third-party liability insurance but things such as collision-damage waivers (CDW, or *assurance tous risques*) vary greatly from company to company. When comparing rates and conditions (ie the fine print), the most important thing to check is the *franchise* (deductible/excess), which for a small car is usually around €600 for damage and €800 for theft. With many companies, you can reduce the excess by half, and perhaps to zero, by paying a daily insurance supplement of €10 to €16. Your credit card may cover CDW if you use it to pay for the rental but the car-hire company won't know anything about this – verify conditions and details with your credit-card issuer to be sure.

Arranging your car hire or fly/drive package before you leave home is usually considerably cheaper than a walk-in rental, but beware of website offers that don't include a CDW or you may be liable for up to 100% of the car's value.

International car-hire companies:

Avis (☎08 21 23 07 60; www.avis.com)

Budget (☎08 25 00 35 64; www.budget.com or www.budget.fr, in French)

Easycar (☎in UK 08710 500 444; www.easycar.com)

Europcar (☎08 25 35 83 58; www.europcar.com or www.europcar.fr, in French)

Hertz (www.hertz.com or www.hertz.fr, in French)

National-Citer (www.nationalcar.com or www.citer.fr)

Sixt (☎08 20 00 74 98; www.sixt.fr, in French)

French car-hire companies:

ADA (www.ada.fr, in French)

DLM (www.dlm.fr, in French)

France Cars (www.francecars.fr, in French)

Locauto (www.locauto.fr)

Renault Rent (☎08 25 10 11 12; www.renault-rent.com, in French)

Rent-a-Car Système (☎08 91 70 02 00; www.rentacar.fr)

Deals can be found on the internet and through companies such as the following:

Auto Europe (☎in USA 1-888-223-5555; www.autoeurope.com)

DriveAway Holidays (☎in Australia 1300 723 972; www.driveaway.com.au)

Holiday Autos (☎in UK 0871-472 5229; www.holidayautos.co.uk)

In this book, car-hire addresses are listed under large cities and towns.

Note that rental cars with automatic transmission are very much the exception in France and will usually need to be ordered well in advance.

For insurance reasons, it is usually forbidden to take rental cars on ferries, eg to Corsica.

All rental cars registered in France have a distinctive number on the licence plate, making them easily identifiable – including to thieves, so never leave anything of value in a parked car, even in the boot.

Bayonne
Bordeaux
Brest
Caen
Caors
Calais
Chambéry
Cherbourg
Clermont-Ferrand
Dijon
Grenoble
Lille
Lyon
Marseille
Nantes
Nice
Paris
Perpignan
Strasbourg
Toulouse

An International Driving Permit (IDP), valid only if accompanied by your original licence, is good for a year and can be issued by your local automobile association before you leave home.

Drivers must carry the following at all times:

- » passport or an EU national ID card
- » valid driving licence (*permis de conduire*; most foreign licences can be used in France for up to a year)
- » car-ownership papers, known as a *carte grise* (grey card)
- » proof of third-party liability *assurance* (insurance)

Fuel

Essence (petrol), also known as *carburant* (fuel), costs around €1.40/L (US\$7 per US gallon) for 95 unleaded (Sans Plomb 95 or SP95, usually available from a green pump) and €1.30 for diesel (*diesel*, *gazole* or *gasoil*, usually available from a yellow pump). Filling up (*faire le plein*) is most expensive at autoroute rest stops and often cheapest at hypermarkets.

Many small petrol stations close on Sunday afternoons and, even in cities, it can be hard to find a staffed station open late at night. In general, after-hours purchases (eg at hypermarkets' fully automatic, 24-hour stations) can only be made with a credit card that has an embedded PIN chip, so if all you've got is cash or a magnetic-strip credit card, you could be stuck.

Insurance

Third-party liability insurance (*assurance au tiers*) is compulsory for all vehicles in France, including cars brought in from abroad. Normally, cars registered and insured in other European countries can circulate freely in France, but it's a good idea to contact your insurance company before you leave home to make sure you've got coverage – and to check whom to contact in case of a breakdown or accident.

If you get into a minor accident with no injuries, the easiest way for drivers to sort things out with their insurance companies is to fill out a *Constat Amiable d'Accident Automobile* (European Accident Statement), a standardised way of recording important details about what happened. In rental cars it's usually in the packet of documents in the glove compartment. Make sure the report includes any information that will help you prove that the accident was not your fault. Remember, if it was your fault you may be liable for a hefty insurance deductible/excess. Don't sign anything you don't fully understand. If problems crop up, call the police (☎17).

French-registered cars have details on their insurance company printed on a

little green square affixed to the windscreen.

Parking

In city centres, most on-the-street parking places are *payant* (metered) from about 9am to 7pm (sometimes with a break from noon to 2pm) from Monday to Saturday, except bank holidays. Details on places near city centres where parking is free – and without the usual two-hour time limits – appear in the Getting Around sections of many city listings in this book.

Road Rules

Enforcement of French traffic laws (see www.securiteroutiere.gouv.fr, in French) has been stepped up considerably in recent years. Speed cameras are becoming ever more common, as are radar traps, unmarked police vehicles and saliva drug tests. Fines for many infractions are given on the spot, and serious violations can lead to the confiscation of your driving licence and car.

Speed limits outside built-up areas (except where signposted otherwise):

Undivided N and D highways 90km/h (80km/h when raining)

Non-autoroute divided highways 110km/h (100km/h when raining)

PRIORITY TO THE RIGHT

Under the *priorité à droite* ('priority to the right') rule, any car entering an intersection (including a T-junction) from a road (including a tiny village backstreet) on your right has the right-of-way. Locals assume every driver knows this, so don't be surprised if they courteously cede the right-of-way when you're about to turn from an alley onto a highway – and boldly assert their rights when you're the one zipping down a main road.

Priorité à droite is suspended (eg on arterial roads) when you pass a sign showing an upended yellow square with a black square in the middle. The same sign with a horizontal bar through the square lozenge reinstates the *priorité à droite* rule.

When you arrive at a roundabout at which you do not have the right-of-way (ie the cars already in the roundabout do), you'll often see signs reading *vous n'avez pas la priorité* (you do not have right of way) or *cédez le passage* (give way).

Autoroutes 130km/h (110km/h when raining, 60km/h in icy conditions)

To reduce carbon emissions, autoroute speed limits have recently been reduced to 110km/h in some areas.

Unless otherwise sign-posted, a limit of 50km/h applies in *all* areas designated as built up, no matter how rural they may appear. You must slow to 50km/h the moment you come to a white sign with a red border and a place name written on it; the speed limit applies until you pass an identical sign with a horizontal bar through it.

Most of the speed-limit signs you'll see in cities, towns and villages merely remind you of something you're already supposed to know – that's why they begin with the word *rappel* ('remember'). You can be fined for going as little as 10km over the speed limit.

Other important driving rules:

- » Blood-alcohol limit is 0.05% (0.5g per litre of blood) – the equivalent of two glasses of wine for a 75kg adult. Police often conduct random breathalyser tests and penalties can be severe, including imprisonment.

- » All passengers, including those in the back seat, must wear seat belts.

- » Mobile phones may be used only if they are equipped with a hands-free kit or speakerphone.

- » Turning right on a red light is illegal.

- » Cars from the UK and Ireland must have defectors affixed to their headlights to avoid dazzling oncoming motorists.

- » Radar detectors, even if they're switched off, are illegal; fines are hefty.

Child-seat rules:

- » Children under 10 are not permitted to ride in the front seat (unless the back

is already occupied by other children under 10).

- » A child under 13kg must travel in a backward-facing child seat (permitted in the front seat only for babies under 9kg and if the airbag is deactivated).

- » Up to age 10, children must use a size-appropriate type of front-facing child seat or booster.

All vehicles driven in France must carry a high-visibility reflective safety vest (stored inside the vehicle, not in the trunk/boot), and a reflective triangle. The fine for not carrying one/both is €90/135.

If you'll be driving on snowy roads, make sure you've got snow chains (*chaînes neige*), required by law whenever and wherever the police post signs.

Riders of any type of two-wheeled vehicle with a motor (except motor-assisted bicycles) must wear a helmet. No special licence is required to ride a motorbike whose engine is smaller than 50cc, which is why rental scooters are often rated at 49.9cc.

Hitching

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. Remember that it's safer to travel in pairs and be sure to inform someone of your intended destination. Hitching is not really part of French culture and is not recommended for women in France, even in pairs.

Hitching from city centres is pretty much hopeless, so your best bet is to take public transport to the outskirts. It is illegal to hitch on autoroutes but you can stand near an entrance ramp as long as you don't block traffic. Hitching in remote rural areas is better, but once you

get off the *routes nationales* traffic can be light and local. If your itinerary includes a ferry crossing, it's worth trying to score a ride before the ferry since vehicle tickets usually include a number of passengers free of charge. At dusk, give up and think about finding somewhere to stay.

Ride Share

A number of organisations around France arrange *covoiturage* (car sharing), ie putting people looking for rides in touch with drivers going to the same destination. The best known is Paris-based **Allostop** (20153 20 42 42; www.allostop.net, in French; ☎phone staffed 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), where you pay a per-kilometre fee to the driver (€15/27 for 300/700km) plus an administrative charge (€3 to €8, depending on the distance). You might also try www.covoiturage.fr (in French) or, for international journeys, www.karzoo.eu.

Local Transport

France's cities and larger towns have world-class public-transport systems. There are *métros* (underground subway systems) in Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Lille and Toulouse and ultramodern light-rail lines (*tramways*) in cities such as Bordeaux, Grenoble, Lille, Lyon, Nancy, Nantes, Nice, Reims, Rouen and Strasbourg, as well as parts of greater Paris.

In addition to a *billet à l'unité* (single ticket), you can purchase a *carte* (booklet or bunch) of 10 tickets or a *pass journée* (all-day pass).

For details, see Getting Around sections under city and town listings.

Taxi

All medium and large train stations – and many small ones – have a taxi stand out front. For details on the

tariffs and regulations applicable in major cities, see p133. In small cities and towns, where taxi drivers are unlikely to find another fare anywhere near where they let you off, one-way and return trips often cost the same. Tariffs are about 30% higher at night and on Sundays and holidays. Having a cab wait for you while you visit something costs about €19 an hour (about €30 in Paris). There may be a surcharge to get picked up at a train station or airport and a small additional fee for a fourth passenger and/or for suitcases.

Train

Travelling by train in France is a comfortable, classy and environmentally sustainable way to see the country. Since many train stations have car-hire agencies, it's easy to combine rail travel with rural exploration by car.

The jewel in the crown of France's public-transport system – alongside the Paris *métro* – is its extensive rail network, almost all of it run by the state-owned **SNCF** (☎36 35; www.sncf.com). Although it employs the most advanced rail technology, the network's layout reflects the country's centuries-old Paris-centric nature: most of the principal rail lines radiate out from Paris like the spokes of a wheel, the result being that services between provincial towns situated on different spokes can be infrequent and slow. For a map of France's rail system, see p976. Up-to-the-minute information on *perturbations* (service disruptions), eg because of strikes, can be found on www.infolignes.com (in French).

Since its inauguration in the 1980s, the pride and joy of SNCF – and the French – is the renowned **TGV** (Train à Grande Vitesse; www.tgv.com), pronounced 'teh zheh veh',

LEFT-LUGGAGE FACILITIES

Because of security concerns, few French train stations still have *consignes automatiques* (left-luggage lockers), but in some larger stations you can leave your bags in a *consigne manuelle* (staffed left-luggage facility) – usually in an out-of-the-way corner of the station – where items are handed over in person and x-rayed before being stowed. Charges are €5 for up to 10 hours and €8 for 24 hours; payment must be made in cash. To find out which stations let you leave your bags and when their *consignes* are open (they're often closed on Sunday and after 7pm or 8pm), go to www.gares-en-mouvement.com, select a station, click 'Practical Information' ('Services en gare') and then the 'Services' tab.

which zips passengers along at speeds of up to 320km/h (198mph). In 2007, a specially modified TGV achieved a new speed record for non-maglev (magnetic levitation) trains: 574.8km/h.

The four main TGV lines (or LGVs, short for *lignes à grande vitesse*, ie high-speed rail lines) head north, east, southeast and southwest from Paris (trains use slower local tracks to get to destinations off the main line):

TGV Nord, Thalys & Eurostar Link Paris Gare du Nord with Arras, Lille, Calais, Brussels (Bruxelles-Midi), Amsterdam, Cologne and, via the Channel Tunnel, Ashford, Ebbsfleet and London St Pancras.

TGV Est Européen Connects Paris Gare de l'Est with Reims, Nancy, Metz, Strasbourg, Zurich and Germany, including Frankfurt and Stuttgart. At present, the super-high-speed track stretches only as far east as Lorraine but it's supposed to reach Strasbourg in 2016.

TGV Sud-Est & TGV Midi-Méditerranée Link Paris Gare de Lyon with the southeast, including Dijon, Lyon, Geneva, the Alps, Avignon, Marseille, Nice and Montpellier.

TGV Atlantique Sud-Ouest & TGV Atlantique

Ouest Link Paris Gare Montparnasse with western and southwestern France, including Brittany (Rennes, Brest, Quimper), Tours, Nantes, Poitiers, La Rochelle, Bordeaux, Biarritz and Toulouse.

The TGV tracks are interconnected, making it possible to go directly from, say, Lyon to Nantes or Bordeaux to Lille without switching trains in Paris – or, like in the old days, having to transfer from one of Paris' six main train stations to another. Stops on the link-up, which runs east and south of Paris, include Charles de Gaulle airport and Disneyland Resort Paris.

A train that is not a TGV is often referred to as a *corail*, a *classique* or, for intraregional services, a **TER** (Train Express Régional; www.ter-sncf.com, in French). Certain non-TGV services have been given peculiar names: **Corail Intercités** Medium-haul routes.

Lunéa (www.coraillunea.fr, in French) Overnight trains with couchettes for cross-country travel – getting rarer in the age of the TGV.

Téoz (www.corailteoz.com, in French) Especially comfortable trains that run southward from Paris Gare d'Austerlitz to Clermont-Ferrand, Limoges, Cahors,

SNCF FARES & DISCOUNTS

Full-fare tickets can be quite expensive. Fortunately, a dizzying array of discounts are available and station staff are very good about helping travellers find the very best fare. But first, the basics:

- » 1st-class travel, where available, costs 20% to 30% extra.
- » Ticket prices for some trains, including most TGVs, are pricier during peak periods.
- » The further in advance you reserve, the lower the fares.
- » Children under four travel for free (€8.50 to any destination if they need a seat).
- » Children aged four to 11 travel for half price.

Discount Tickets

The SNCF's most heavily discounted tickets are known as **Prem's**. They can be booked on the internet, by phone, at ticket windows and from ticket machines a maximum of 90 days and a minimum of 14 days before your travel date. Once you buy a Prem's ticket, it's use it or lose it – getting your money back or changing the time is not allowed.

Bons Plans fares, a grab bag of really cheap options on a changing array of routes and dates, are advertised on www.voyages-sncf.com under the title 'Dernière Minute' (last minute).

In an effort to make train travel both affordable and hip for the iPod generation, the SNCF's youthful subsidiary **iDTGV** (www.idtgv.com) sells tickets (online only) for as little as €19 for advance-purchase TGV travel between about 30 cities.

On regional trains, discount fares requiring neither a discount card nor advance purchase:

Loisir Week-End rates Good for return travel that includes a Saturday night at your destination or involves travel on a Saturday or Sunday.

Découverte fares Available for low-demand 'blue-period' trains to people aged 12 to 25, seniors and the adult travel companions of children under 12.

Mini-Groupe tickets In some regions, these bring big savings for three to six people travelling together, provided you spend a Saturday night at your destination.

Certain French *régions* (eg Basse-Normandie and Alsace) offer great deals on intra-regional TER transport for day trips or weekend travel.

Discount Cards

Reductions of at least 25% (for last-minute bookings), and of 40%, 50% or even 60% (if you reserve well ahead or travel during low-volume 'blue' periods), are available with several discount cards (valid for one year):

Carte 12-25 (www.12-25-sncf.com in French; €49) Available to travellers aged 12 to 25.

Carte Enfant Plus (www.enfantplus-sncf.com, in French; €70) For one to four adults travelling with a child aged four to 11.

Carte Escapades (www.escapades-sncf.com, in French; €85) For people aged 26 to 59. Gets you discounts on return journeys of at least 200km that either include a Saturday night away or only involve travel on a Saturday or Sunday.

Carte Sénior (www.senior-sncf.com, in French; €56) For travellers over 60.

Rail Passes

Residents of Europe who do not live in France can purchase an **InterRail One Country Pass** (www.interrailnet.com; 3/4/6/8 days €194/209/269/299, 12-25 yr €126/136/175/194), which entitles its bearer to unlimited travel on SNCF trains for three to eight days over the course of a month.

For non-European residents, **Rail Europe** (www.raileurope.com, www.raileurope.com.au) offers the **France Rail Pass** (www.francerrailpass.com; 3/6/9 days over 1 month US\$186/268/341).

You need to really rack up the kilometres to make these passes worthwhile.

Toulouse, Montpellier, Perpignan, Marseille and Nice.

Transilien (www.transilien.com) SNCF services in the Île de France (the Paris region).

For details on especially scenic train routes all around France, see www.trainstouristiques-ter.com.

Information on train accessibility for people with disabilities can be found at www.accessibilite.sncf.fr (in French) and, for greater Paris, www.infomobi.com (in French).

Long-distance trains sometimes split at a station – that is, each half of the train heads off for a different destination. Check the destination panel on your car as you board or you could wind up very, very far from wherever it was you intended to go.

Tickets & Reservations

Large stations often have separate ticket windows for *international*, *grandes lignes* (long-haul) and *banlieue* (suburban) lines, and for

people whose train is about to leave (*départ immédiat* or *départ dans l'heure*). Nearly every SNCF station has at least one *borne libre-service* (self-service terminal) or *billetterie automatique* (automatic ticket machine) that accepts both cash and PIN-chip credit cards. Select the Union Jack for instructions in English.

Using a credit card, you can buy a ticket by phone or via the SNCF internet booking site (www.voyages-sncf.com, in French) and either have it sent to you by post (if you have an address in France) or collect it from any SNCF ticket office or from train-station ticket machines.

Before boarding the train, you must validate (*composter*) your ticket by time-stamping it in a *composteur*, one of those yellow posts located on the way to the platform. If you forget (or don't have a ticket for some other reason), find a conductor on the train before they find you – otherwise you can be fined.

CHANGES & REIMBURSEMENTS

For trains that do not assign reserved seats (eg TER and Corail Intercités trains), full-fare tickets are useable whenever you like for 61 days from the date they were purchased. Like all SNCF tickets, they cannot be replaced if lost or stolen.

If you've got a full-fare *Loisir Week-End* ticket, you can change your reservation by phone, internet or at train stations for no charge until the day before your departure; changes made on the day of your reserved trip incur a charge of €10 (€3 for tickets bought with a discount card).

Pro tickets (eg TGV Pro, TéoZ Pro) allow full reimbursement up to 30 minutes after the time of departure (eg by calling ☎36 35). If you turn up at your departure station up to two hours after your original travel time, you can reschedule your trip on a later train.

Very cheap promotional tickets (eg Prem's) cannot be modified and are non-reimbursable.

Language

Standard French is taught and spoken throughout France. Regional accents and dialects are an important part of identity in certain regions, but you'll have no trouble being understood anywhere if you stick to standard French, which we've also used in the phrases below.

The sounds used in spoken French can almost all be found in English. There are a couple of exceptions: nasal vowels (represented in our pronunciation guides by **o** or **u** followed by an almost inaudible nasal consonant sound **m**, **n** or **ng**), the 'funny' **u** (**ew** in our guides) and the deep-in-the-throat **r**. Bearing these few points in mind and reading our pronunciation guides below as if they were English, you'll be understood just fine.

BASICS

French has two words for 'you' – use the polite form *vous* unless you're talking to close friends, children or animals in which case you'd use the informal *tu*. You can also use *tu* when a person invites you to use *tu*.

All nouns in French are either masculine or feminine, and so are the adjectives, articles *le/la* (the) and *un/une* (a), and possessives *mon/ma* (my), *ton/ta* (your) and *son/sa* (his, her) that go with the nouns. In this chapter we have included masculine and feminine forms where necessary, separated by a slash and indicated with 'm/f'.

Hello.	<i>Bonjour.</i>	bon-zhoor
Goodbye.	<i>Au revoir.</i>	o-rer-vwa
Excuse me.	<i>Excusez-moi.</i>	ek-skew-zy-mwa

WANT MORE?

For in-depth language information and handy phrases, check out Lonely Planet's *French Phrasebook*. You'll find it at **shop** lonelyplanet.com, or you can buy Lonely Planet's iPhone phrasebooks at the Apple App Store.

Sorry.	<i>Pardon.</i>	par-don
Yes./No.	<i>Oui./Non.</i>	wee/non
Please.	<i>S'il vous plaît.</i>	seel voo play
Thank you.	<i>Merci.</i>	mair-see

How are you?	
<i>Comment allez-vous?</i>	ko-mon ta-lay-voo
Fine, and you?	
<i>Bien, merci. Et vous?</i>	byun mair-see ay voo
You're welcome.	
<i>De rien.</i>	der ree-en
My name is ...	
<i>Je m'appelle ...</i>	zher ma-pel ...
What's your name?	
<i>Comment vous appelez-vous?</i>	ko-mon voo-za-play voo
Do you speak English?	
<i>Parlez-vous anglais?</i>	par-lay-voo ong-glai
I don't understand.	
<i>Je ne comprends pas.</i>	zher ner kom-pron pa
How much is it?	
<i>C'est combien?</i>	say kom-byun

ACCOMMODATION

Do you have any rooms available?	
<i>Est-ce que vous avez des chambres libres?</i>	es-ker voo za-vay day shom-brer lee-brer
How much is it per night/person?	
<i>Quel est le prix par nuit/personne?</i>	kel ay ler pree par nwee/per-son
Is breakfast included?	
<i>Est-ce que le petit déjeuner est inclus?</i>	es-ker ler per-tee day-zher-nay ayt en-klew

campsite	<i>camping</i>	kom-peeng
dorm	<i>dortoir</i>	dor-twar
guest house	<i>pension</i>	pon-syon
hotel	<i>hôtel</i>	o-tel
youth hostel	<i>auberge de jeunesse</i>	o-berzh der zher-nes
a ... room	<i>une chambre ...</i>	ewn shom-brer ...
single	<i>à un lit</i>	a un lee
double	<i>avec un grand lit</i>	a-vek un gron lee
twin	<i>avec des lits jumeaux</i>	a-vek day lee zhe-w-mo
with (a)...	<i>avec ...</i>	a-vek ...
air-con	<i>climatiseur</i>	kle-ma-tee-zer
bathroom	<i>une salle de bains</i>	ewn sal der bun
window	<i>fenêtre</i>	fer-nay-trer

DIRECTIONS

Where's ...?

Où est ...? **oo ay ...**

What's the address?

Quelle est l'adresse? **kel ay la-dres**

Could you write the address, please?

Est-ce que vous pourriez écrire l'adresse, s'il vous plaît? **es-ker voo poo-ryay ay-kree la-dres seel voo play**

Can you show me (on the map)?

Pouvez-vous m'indiquer (sur la carte)? **poo-vay-voo mun-dee-kay (sew la kart)**

at the corner	<i>au coin</i>	o kwun
at the traffic lights	<i>aux feux</i>	o fer
behind	<i>derrière</i>	dair-ryair
in front of	<i>devant</i>	der-von
far (from)	<i>loin (de)</i>	lwun (der)
left	<i>gauche</i>	gosh
near (to)	<i>près (de)</i>	pray (der)
next to ...	<i>à côté de ...</i>	a ko-tay der...
opposite ...	<i>en face de ...</i>	on fas der ...
right	<i>droite</i>	drwat
straight ahead	<i>tout droit</i>	too drwa

EATING & DRINKING

What would you recommend?

Qu'est-ce que vous conseillez? **kes-ker voo kon-say-yay**

What's in that dish?

Quels sont les ingrédients? **kel son lay zun-gray-dyon**

KEY PATTERNS

To get by in French, mix and match these simple patterns with words of your choice:

Where's (the entry)?

Où est (l'entrée)? **oo ay (lon-tray)**

Where can I (buy a ticket)?

Où est-ce que je peux (acheter un billet)? **oo es-ker zher per (ach-ter un bee-yay)**

When's (the next train)?

Quand est (le prochain train)? **kon ay (ler pro-shun trun)**

How much is (a room)?

C'est combien pour (une chambre)? **say kom-buyn poor (ewn shom-brer)**

Do you have (a map)?

Avez-vous (une carte)? **a-vay voo (ewn kart)**

Is there (a toilet)?

Y a-t-il (des toilettes)? **ee a teel (day twa-let)**

I'd like (to book a room).

Je voudrais (réserver une chambre). **zher voo-dray (ray-ser-vay ewn shom-brer)**

Can I (enter)?

Puis-je (entrer)? **pweezh (on-tray)**

Could you please (help)?

Pouvez-vous (m'aider), s'il vous plaît? **poo-vay voo (may-day) seel voo play**

Do I have to (book a seat)?

Faut-il (réserver une place)? **fo-teel (ray-ser-vay ewn plas)**

I'm a vegetarian.

Je suis végétarien/ végétarienne. **zher swee vay-zhay-ta-ryun/ vay-zhay-ta-ryen (m/f)**

I don't eat ...

Je ne mange pas ... **zher ner monzh pa ...**

Cheers!

Santé! **son-tay**

That was delicious.

C'était délicieux! **say-tay day-lee-syer**

Please bring the bill.

Apportez-moi l'addition, s'il vous plaît. **a-por-tay-mwa la-dee-syon seel voo play**

I'd like to reserve a table for ...

Je voudrais réserver une table pour ... **zher voo-dray ray-zair-vay ewn ta-blee poor ...**

(eight) o'clock (vingt) heures (vungt) er

(two) people (deux) personnes (der) pair-son

Signs

Entrée	Entrance
Femmes	Women
Fermé	Closed
Hommes	Men
Interdit	Prohibited
Ouvert	Open
Renseignements	Information
Sortie	Exit
Toilettes/WC	Toilets

Key Words

appetiser	<i>entrée</i>	<i>on-tray</i>
bottle	<i>bouteille</i>	<i>boo-tay</i>
breakfast	<i>petit déjeuner</i>	<i>per-tee day-zher-nay</i>
children's menu	<i>menu pour enfants</i>	<i>mer-new poor on-fon</i>
cold	<i>froid</i>	<i>frwa</i>
delicatessen	<i>traiteur</i>	<i>tray-ter</i>
dinner	<i>dîner</i>	<i>dee-nay</i>
dish	<i>plat</i>	<i>pla</i>
food	<i>nourriture</i>	<i>noo-ree-tewr</i>
fork	<i>fourchette</i>	<i>foor-shet</i>
glass	<i>verre</i>	<i>vair</i>
grocery store	<i>épicerie</i>	<i>ay-pees-ree</i>
highchair	<i>chaise haute</i>	<i>shay zot</i>
hot	<i>chaud</i>	<i>sho</i>
knife	<i>couteau</i>	<i>koo-to</i>
local speciality	<i>spécialité locale</i>	<i>spay-sya-lee-tay lo-kal</i>
lunch	<i>déjeuner</i>	<i>day-zher-nay</i>
main course	<i>plat principal</i>	<i>pla prun-see-pal</i>
market	<i>marché</i>	<i>mar-shay</i>
menu (in English)	<i>carte (en anglais)</i>	<i>kart (on ong-glavy)</i>
plate	<i>assiette</i>	<i>a-syet</i>
spoon	<i>cuillère</i>	<i>kwee-yair</i>
wine list	<i>carte des vins</i>	<i>kart day vun</i>
with/without	<i>avec/sans</i>	<i>a-vek/son</i>

Meat & Fish

beef	<i>boeuf</i>	<i>berf</i>
chicken	<i>poulet</i>	<i>poo-lay</i>
lamb	<i>agneau</i>	<i>a-nyo</i>
pork	<i>porc</i>	<i>por</i>
turkey	<i>dinde</i>	<i>dund</i>
veal	<i>veau</i>	<i>vo</i>

Fruit & Vegetables

apple	<i>pomme</i>	<i>pom</i>
apricot	<i>abricot</i>	<i>ab-ree-ko</i>
asparagus	<i>asperge</i>	<i>a-spairzh</i>
beans	<i>haricots</i>	<i>a-ree-ko</i>
beetroot	<i>betterave</i>	<i>be-trav</i>
cabbage	<i>chou</i>	<i>shoo</i>
celery	<i>céleri</i>	<i>sel-ree</i>
cherry	<i>cerise</i>	<i>ser-reez</i>
corn	<i>maïs</i>	<i>ma-ees</i>
cucumber	<i>concombre</i>	<i>kong-kom-brer</i>
gherkin (pickle)	<i>cornichon</i>	<i>kor-nee-shon</i>
grape	<i>raisin</i>	<i>ray-zun</i>
leek	<i>poireau</i>	<i>pwa-ro</i>
lemon	<i>citron</i>	<i>see-tron</i>
lettuce	<i>laitue</i>	<i>lay-tew</i>
mushroom	<i>champignon</i>	<i>shom-pee-nyon</i>
peach	<i>pêche</i>	<i>pesh</i>
peas	<i>petit pois</i>	<i>per-tee pwa</i>
(red/green) pepper	<i>poivron (rouge/vert)</i>	<i>pwa-vron (roozh/vair)</i>
pineapple	<i>ananas</i>	<i>a-na-nas</i>
plum	<i>prune</i>	<i>prewn</i>
potato	<i>pomme de terre</i>	<i>pom der tair</i>
prune	<i>pruneau</i>	<i>prew-no</i>
pumpkin	<i>citrouille</i>	<i>see-troo-yer</i>
shallot	<i>échalote</i>	<i>eh-sha-lot</i>
spinach	<i>épinards</i>	<i>eh-pee-nar</i>
strawberry	<i>fraise</i>	<i>frez</i>
tomato	<i>tomate</i>	<i>to-mat</i>
turnip	<i>navet</i>	<i>na-vay</i>
vegetable	<i>légume</i>	<i>lay-gewm</i>

Other

bread	<i>pain</i>	<i>pun</i>
butter	<i>beurre</i>	<i>ber</i>
cheese	<i>fromage</i>	<i>fro-mazh</i>
egg	<i>œuf</i>	<i>erf</i>
honey	<i>miel</i>	<i>myel</i>
jam	<i>confiture</i>	<i>kon-fee-tewr</i>
lentils	<i>lentilles</i>	<i>lon-tee-yer</i>
oil	<i>huile</i>	<i>weel</i>
pasta/noodles	<i>pâtes</i>	<i>pat</i>
pepper	<i>poivre</i>	<i>pwa-vrer</i>
rice	<i>riz</i>	<i>ree</i>
salt	<i>sel</i>	<i>sel</i>
sugar	<i>sucre</i>	<i>sew-krer</i>
vinegar	<i>vinaigre</i>	<i>vee-nay-grer</i>

Drinks

beer	<i>bière</i>	bee-yair
coffee	<i>café</i>	ka-fay
(orange) juice	<i>jus (d'orange)</i>	zhew (do-ronzh)
milk	<i>lait</i>	lay
tea	<i>thé</i>	tay
(mineral) water	<i>eau (minérale)</i>	o (mee-nay-ral)
(red) wine	<i>vin (rouge)</i>	vun (roozh)
(white) wine	<i>vin (blanc)</i>	vun (blong)

EMERGENCIES

Help!

Au secours! o skoor

I'm lost.

Je suis perdu/perdue. zhe swee-pair-dew (m/f)

Leave me alone!

Fichez-moi la paix! fee-shay-mwa la pay

There's been an accident.

Il y a eu un accident. eel ya ew un ak-see-don

Call a doctor.

Appelez un médecin. a-play un mayd-sun

Call the police.

Appelez la police. a-play la po-lees

I'm ill.

Je suis malade. zher swee ma-lad

It hurts here.

J'ai une douleur ici. zhay ewn doo-ler ee-see

I'm allergic to ...

Je suis allergique ... zher swee za-lair-zheek ...

SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'd like to buy ...

Je voudrais acheter ... zher voo-dray ash-tay ...

May I look at it?

Est-ce que je peux le voir? es-ker zher per ler vvar

I'm just looking.

Je regarde. zher rer-gard

I don't like it.

Cela ne me plaît pas. ser-la ner mer play pa

How much is it?

C'est combien? say kom-byun

It's too expensive.

C'est trop cher. say tro shair

Question Words

How?	<i>Comment?</i>	ko-mon
What?	<i>Quoi?</i>	kwa
When?	<i>Quand?</i>	kon
Where?	<i>Où?</i>	oo
Who?	<i>Qui?</i>	kee
Why?	<i>Pourquoi?</i>	poor-kwa

Can you lower the price?

Vous pouvez baisser le prix?

voo poo-vay bay-say
ler pree

There's a mistake in the bill.

Il y a une erreur dans la note.

eel ya ewn ay-rer don
la not

ATM

guichet automatique de banque
gee-shay
o-to-ma-teek
der bonk

credit card

carte de crédit
kart der kray-dee

internet café

cybercafé
see-bair-ka-fay

post office

bureau de poste
bew-ro der post

tourist office

office de tourisme
o-fees der
too-rees-mer

TIME & DATES

What time is it?

Quelle heure est-il? kel er ay til

It's (eight) o'clock.

Il est (huit) heures. il ay (weet) er

It's half past (10).

Il est (dix) heures et demie. il ay (deez) er
ay day-mee

morning

matin
ma-tun

afternoon

après-midi
a-pray-mee-dee

evening

soir
swar

yesterday

hier
yair

today

aujourd'hui
o-zhoor-dwee

tomorrow

demain
der-mun

Monday

lundi
lun-dee

Tuesday

mardi
mar-dee

Wednesday

mercredi
mair-krer-dee

Thursday

jeudi
zher-dee

Friday

vendredi
von-drer-dee

Saturday

samedi
sam-dee

Sunday

dimanche
dee-monsh

January

janvier
zhon-vyay

February

février
fayv-ryay

March

mars
mars

April

avril
a-vreel

May

mai
may

June

juin
zhwun

July

juillet
zhwee-yay

August

août
oot

September

septembre
sep-tom-brer

October

octobre
ok-to-brer

November

novembre
no-vom-brer

December

décembre
day-som-brer

Numbers

1	un	un
2	deux	der
3	trois	trwa
4	quatre	ka-trer
5	cinq	sungk
6	six	sees
7	sept	set
8	huit	weet
9	neuf	nerf
10	dix	dees
20	vingt	vung
30	trente	tront
40	quarante	ka-ront
50	cinquante	sung-kont
60	soixante	swa-sont
70	soixante-dix	swa-son-dees
80	quatre-vingt	ka-trer-vung
90	quatre-vingt-dix	ka-trer-vung-dees
100	cent	son
1000	mille	meel

TRANSPORT

Public Transport

boat	bateau	ba-to
bus	bus	bews
plane	avion	a-vyon
train	train	trun

I want to go to ...

Je voudrais aller à ... zher voo-dray a-lay a ...

Does it stop at (Amboise)?

Est-ce qu'il s'arrête à (Amboise)? es-kil sa-ret a (om-bwaz)

At what time does it leave/arrive?

À quelle heure est-ce qu'il part/arrive? a kel er es kil par/a-reev

Can you tell me when we get to ...?

Pouvez-vous me dire quand nous arrivons à ...? poo-vay-voo mer deer kon noo za-ree-von a ...

I want to get off here.

Je veux descendre ici. zher ver day-son-drer ee-see

first	premier	prer-myay
last	dernier	dair-nyay
next	prochain	pro-shun

a ... ticket	un billet ...	un bee-yay ...
1st-class	de première classe	der prem-yair klas
2nd-class	de deuxième classe	der der-zyem las
one-way	simple	sum-pler
return	aller et retour	a-lay ay rer-toor

aisle seat	côté couloir	ko-tay kool-war
delayed	en retard	on rer-tar
cancelled	annulé	a-new-lay
platform	quai	kay
ticket office	guichet	gee-shay
timetable	horaire	o-rair
train station	gare	gar
window seat	côté fenêtre	ko-tay fe-ne-trer

Driving & Cycling

I'd like to hire a ...	Je voudrais louer ...	zher voo-dray loo-way ...
4WD	un quatre-quatre	un kat-kat
car	une voiture	ewn vwa-tewr
bicycle	un vélo	un vay-lo
motorcycle	une moto	ewn mo-to

child seat	siège-enfant	syezh-on-fon
diesel	diesel	dyay-zel
helmet	casque	kask
mechanic	mécanicien	may-ka-nee-syun
petrol/gas	essence	ay-sons
service station	station-service	sta-syon-ser-vees

Is this the road to ...?

C'est la route pour ...? say la root poor ...

(How long) Can I park here?

(Combien de temps) (kom-byun der tom)
Est-ce que je peux stationner ici? es-ker zher per sta-syo-nay ee-see

The car/motorbike has broken down (at ...).

La voiture/moto est tombée en panne (à ...). la vwa-tewr/mo-to ay tom-bay on pan (a ...)

I have a flat tyre.

Mon pneu est à plat. mom pner ay ta pla

I've run out of petrol.

Je suis en panne d'essence. zher swee zon pan day-sons

I've lost my car keys.

J'ai perdu les clés de ma voiture. zhay per-dew lay klay der ma vwa-tewr

GLOSSARY

(m) indicates masculine gender,
(f) feminine gender and (pl)
plural

accueil (m) – reception

alignements (m pl) – a series of standing stones, or menhirs, in straight lines

AOC – Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée; system of French wine and olive oil classification showing that items have met government regulations as to where and how they are produced

AOP – Appellation d'Origine Protégée; Europe-wide equivalent to the AOC

arrondissement (m) – administrative division of large city; abbreviated on signs as 1er (1st arrondissement), 2e (2nd) etc

atelier (m) – workshop or studio

auberge – inn

auberge de jeunesse (f) – youth hostel

baie (f) – bay

bassin (m) – bay or basin

bastide (f) – medieval settlement in southwestern France, usually built on a grid plan and surrounding an arcaded square; fortified town; also a country house in Provence

belle époque (f) – literally 'beautiful age'; era of elegance and gaiety characterising fashionable Parisian life in the period preceding WWI

billet (m) – ticket

billet jumelé (m) – combination ticket, good for more than one site, museum etc

billetterie (f) – ticket office or counter

bouchon – Lyonnais bistro

boulangerie (f) – bakery or bread shop

boules (f pl) – a game similar to lawn bowls played with heavy metal balls on a sandy pitch; also called *pétanque*

BP – *boîte postale*; post office box

brasserie (f) – restaurant similar to a *café* but usually serving full meals all day (original meaning: brewery)

bureau de change (m)

– exchange bureau

bureau de poste (m)

– post office

carnet (m) – a book of five or 10 bus, tram or metro tickets sold at a reduced rate

carrefour (m) – crossroad

carte (f) – card; menu; map

cave (f) – wine cellar

chambre (f) – room

chambre d'hôte (f) – B&B

charcuterie (f) – butcher's shop and delicatessen; the prepared meats it sells

cimetière (m) – cemetery

col (m) – mountain pass

consigne or **consigne**

manuelle (f) – left-luggage office

consigne automatique (f) – left-luggage locker

correspondance (f) – linking tunnel or walkway, eg in the metro; rail or bus connection

couchette (f) – sleeping berth on a train or ferry

cour (f) – courtyard

crèmerie (f) – dairy or cheese shop

dégustation (f) – tasting

demi (m) – 330mL glass of beer

demi-pension (f) – half board (B&B with either lunch or dinner)

département (m) – administrative division of France

donjon (m) – castle keep

église (f) – church

épicerie (f) – small grocery store

ESF – École de Ski Français; France's leading ski school

fest-noz or **festoù-noz** (pl) – night festival

fête (f) – festival

Fnac – retail chain selling

entertainment goods, electronics and tickets

forêt (f) – forest

formule or **formule rapide**

(f) – lunchtime set similar to a *menu* but with two of three courses on offer (eg starter and main or main and dessert)

fromagerie (f) – cheese shop

FUAJ – Fédération Unie des Auberges de Jeunesse; France's major hostel association

funiculaire (m) – funicular railway

galerie (f) – covered shopping centre or arcade

gare or **gare SNCF** (f)

– railway station

gare maritime (f) – ferry terminal

gare routière (f) – bus station

gendarmerie (f) – police station; police force

gîte d'étape (m) – hikers accommodation, usually in a village

gîte rural (m) – country cottage

golfe (m) – gulf

GR – *grande randonnée*; long-distance hiking trail

grand cru (m) – wine of exceptional quality

halles (f pl) – covered market; central food market

halte routière (f) – bus stop

horaire (m) – timetable or schedule

hostellerie – hostelry

hôtel de ville (m) – city or town hall

hôtel particulier (m) – private mansion

intra-muros – old city (literally 'within the walls')

jardin (m) – garden

jardin botanique (m) – botanic garden

laverie (f) or **lavomatique** (m) – laundrette

mairie (f) – city or town hall

maison du parc (f) – a national park's headquarters and/or visitors centre
marché (m) – market
marché aux puces (m) – flea market
marché couvert (m) – covered market
mas (m) – farmhouse in southern France
menu (m) – fixed-price meal with two or more courses
mistral (m) – strong north or northwest wind in southern France
musée (m) – museum
navette (f) – shuttle bus, train or boat
palais de justice (m) – law courts
parapente – paragliding
parlement (m) – parliament
parvis (m) – square
pâtisserie (f) – cake and pastry shop
pétanque (f) – a game similar to lawn bowls played with heavy metal balls on a sandy pitch; also called *boules*
place (f) – square or plaza
plage (f) – beach
plan (m) – city map
plan du quartier (m) – map

of nearby streets (hung on the wall near metro exits)
plat du jour (m) – daily special in a restaurant
pont (m) – bridge
porte (f) – gate in a city wall
poste (f) – post office
préfecture (f) – prefecture (capital of a *département*)
presqu'île (f) – peninsula
pression (f) – draught beer
puy (m) – volcanic cone or peak
quai (m) – quay or railway platform
quartier (m) – quarter or district
refuge (m) – mountain hut, basic shelter for hikers
région (f) – administrative division of France
rive (f) – bank of a river
rond point (m) – roundabout
sentier (m) – trail
service des urgences (f) – casualty ward
ski de fond – cross-country skiing
SNCF – Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer; state-owned railway company
SNCM – Société Nationale Maritime Corse-Méditerranée; state-owned ferry

company linking Corsica and mainland France
sortie (f) – exit
square (m) – public garden
tabac (m) – tobacconist (also selling bus tickets, phonecards etc)
table d'hôte – set menu at a fixed price
taxe de séjour (f) – municipal tourist tax
télécarte (f) – phonecard
téléphérique (m) – cableway or cable car
télesiège (m) – chairlift
télési (m) – ski lift or tow
TGV – *Train à Grande Vitesse*; high-speed train or bullet train
tour (f) – tower
vallée (f) – valley
v.f. (f) – *version française*; a film dubbed in French
vieille ville (f) – old town or old city
ville neuve (f) – new town or new city
v.o. (f) – *version originale*; a nondubbed film with French subtitles
voie (f) – train platform
VTT – *vélo tout terrain*; mountain bike
winstub – traditional Alsatian eatery

behind the scenes

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